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"HELLO!"
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AN
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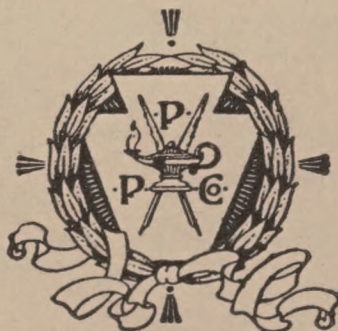
A Story for Girls

BY
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Author of "Philip Leicester," etc.

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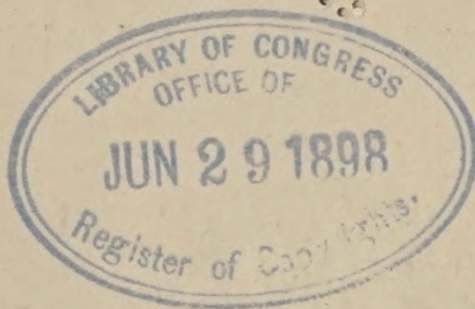
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AN ODD LITTLE LASS

CHAPTER I

WALNUT COURT

“Now who’d you s’pose she is? What you s’pose she gave us this for?”

The boy addressed, a rather thin, solemn-faced little fellow of about ten, shook his head doubtfully, but continued looking alternately at the alert young lady disappearing in the crowd, and at the five-cent piece she had smilingly bestowed on Lonnie.

“Well,” said Lonnie, decisively, “we’ll go straight and spend it this very minute before anybody gets it. Licorish?”

“Yep,” assented Ted, his face lighting up;

and the two ran to the small grocery store steadily patronized by the Walnut Court infants in their times of plenty.

Lonnie was the one who had attracted the young lady with the five-cent piece. She was a child very likely to attract any one who cared for pretty children. There were shining bronze and golden lights in her curly hair, her brown eyes snapped with fun, or gazed up at one with a somewhat misleading expression of innocence. City born and bred, her cheeks had the color of a wild rose, and she would have been regarded as a credit to the most hygienic upbringing—something that had never fallen to her lot. Her pretty little mouth had a way of uttering impudence which won nothing but applause, partly because she was quite small for her age, and partly because an instinct of self-preservation taught her when she had gone far enough.

Ever since Lonnie could remember she had lived with Ted's mother. She had worn clothes as warm, and had had as good food as Ted,

or as the other children in their neighborhood. Allowing for the willfulness of her disposition she had received no more ill-treatment than Ted. In many ways she had so far seemed the favorite one, for when it became necessary to Mrs. Lakin to show a comfortable, healthy, pretty child, Lonnie was all that could be desired.

Honest and kindly women with little girls of their own, in the various courts and alleys where Mrs. Lakin temporarily sojourned, shook their heads doubtfully over the future prospects of Lonnie. "She's too bright by half," they would say, "and no bringin' up." Ted was so unobtrusive, and spoke up so nicely when he was spoken to, that a far more favorable opinion was entertained of his moral qualities. His mother usually sent him to school, but he hated to go. He was a sensitive little fellow, and his clothes never suited his ideas of what was fitting. He was bright enough and did well in school when he went, but he was so incorrigibly tardy and so given to absence that he was far from being a favorite with any of his teachers. But Lonnie,

in the short intervals when she had attended a kindergarten or a primary school, though generally showing a skill amounting to genius for avoiding all duties, had won the interested attention of her teachers.

The two children, liberally supplied with the black succulent sticks they had purchased, returned to the doorstep in Walnut Court nearest Cambridge Street.

"Why don't you talk, Lonnie?" said Ted, astonished at the unaccustomed silence of his companion.

"I was thinking about that lady. Now wasn't she a nice lady! She didn't look like a Cambridge Street lady, she looked like a Back Bay lady. Didn't she have on a pretty dress and hat?"

"Yes, she did. But she wasn't your kind of a lady."

"What you mean?" said Lonnie, hotly.

"I meant what I said," and Ted spoke with the air of a philosopher long accustomed to pondering on the deep things of life.

"She was a nice, quiet sort of a lady, that liked nice sort of things—the way I do," with a teasing glance at Lonnie, "and you're all in for rows and that sort of thing."

"You're a mean, horrid boy!" flamed Lonnie, "and after I gave you all that licorish!"

"It's so, just the same. You're always the very first in a stir-around and helping keep everybody by the ears."

"I wouldn't have any good times at all if I didn't. It's just because I can do those ways that your mother don't beat me all the time," said Lonnie defensively.

Ted shrugged his shoulders. "Anyway, it's what I said; that lady's different."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I know. I watch people a lot."

"You're no good yourself; you don't like to go to school."

"I wish I never had to go inside that school again, nor any school!"

After that Ted seemed to prefer the bitterness of his own reflections, for he would talk no

more, and Lonnie found herself obliged to do what she did as seldom as possible—to think. She hated to think. To sit on a step the way Ted did and think was abhorrent to her. Action was more in her line.

Now she felt very uncomfortable. She was so cloyed with licorice that there was no more pleasure to be had in that quarter. Ted refused to talk. The court seemed to be singularly empty of available children.

Depressing incidents came crowding into her mind. Lately she had begun to feel uneasy with Mrs. Lakin; and down in her heart she was ashamed of what the Walnut Court neighbors said of her noisy little ways.

She determined to go somewhere at once so that she could stop thinking. She could go down to the Charles River bridge and watch the wagons, and drays, and boats, and the Back Bay houses black against the sunset, and the steady sweep of the river. But she knew it would be chilly waiting for the sunset this late October day down on the bridge.

She could go up any one of those steep streets past the State House and down to the Common to the Frog Pond. Somebody would be sure to be sailing a boat there. On the whole, that was the best, and Ted liked to go to the Common. He would sit mooning on that step until dark if she didn't get him to do something.

"Ted, come on ; let's go to the Common."

"Too far."

"Oh, pshaw ! come on !"

"Too late."

"'Tis not ; come on !"

And after sufficient persuasion, to which they were both well accustomed, the two children, with their licorice-smeared faces and hands, started off to the Common.

"Where would you live, Ted, if you could ?" asked Lonnie.

"Well, I wouldn't live down here, sure," was the unexpected lively response. "I don't like so much noise, and talk, and goings on. I'd live where it was pretty, and quiet, and everything nice."

“My! Walnut Court’s too quiet to suit me. I’d like to live where something was going on all the time.”

“What kind of goings on?”

“Oh! parades, and processions, and funerals, and accidents, and the police patrol—everything!”

“I like parades, but I don’t like none of the other things.”

“Ted, do you suppose that pretty lady will go by any more?”

“I never saw her before.”

“Me neither, but she looked as if she knew where she was going.”

“What would you do if you saw her again, Lonnie? Ask her for another five cents?”

“No, I’d ask her where she lived.”

“She wouldn’t tell you for fear you’d come and bother her.”

“Then I’d ask her what kind of a lady she was.”

“She wouldn’t know what you meant.”

They reached the Common and amused them-

selves at the Frog Pond until Lonnie, still thirsting for excitement, induced Ted to go with her to Tremont Street.

"I like to hear Tom and all the boys hollerin' their papers. Why don't you sell papers, Ted?"

"No license."

"Why don't you get a license?"

"No money."

"Well, these boys can. Why can't you?"

"Oh, I don't seem to be in such a rush someway. Mother says I needn't to sell 'em anyway."

"But you could get money and buy good clothes to go to school in."

Lonnie could always touch the quick; her aim was sure, she never missed.

"I'd like that, sure."

They stood idly by the fountain when a confused noise arose, different from the accustomed noise of the street.

"Thief, I guess!" shouted Lonnie, ecstatically, starting for the gathering crowd.

“Accident!” cried Ted, rapidly following.

The excitement was about over when the children reached the spot. The crowd was dispersing and the wagon was just rounding the next corner.

“What was it?” asked Lonnie, eagerly, of a newsboy. He looked at the dirty little flushed face and laughed.

“Accident. Didn’t you see it was the ambulance?”

“Wish we’d got here sooner,” rejoined Lonnie. “Who was it?”

“A woman. Couldn’t seem to get out of the way of a wagon, and was run down, and got her leg broke, I guess. They took her to the hospital.”

“Wish we’d been here! Come on, Ted, it’s gettin’ cold. Let’s go on home.”

CHAPTER II

A GOOD BEGINNING

THE children were very slow about going home, and when they reached there they found Walnut Court in a commotion.

Immediately at the sight of the two cold, tired, and dirty children, loud expressions of sympathy were heard.

“The poor little things!” “I’ll supper ’em.” “Ted can sleep with my Tom.” “I’m willin’ to do for Ted while his mother’s down, but I won’t have Lonnie around.” “Me neither, she’s too lively, poor child!”

It took but a very short time, indeed, for Lonnie to comprehend the situation. Mrs. Lakin had met with an accident in Tremont Street, and had been taken to the hospital. Her leg was broken, and it would probably be some time before she was around. To add to

the confusion the tenement agent had happened to be in the building, and as Mrs. Lakin was already owing him two months' rent and under notice to leave, he claimed possession of the rooms. The furniture, such as it was, had been received by two or three neighbors for safe-keeping, and Ted and Lonnie had appeared in time to keep up the excitement.

That nearly all the neighbors were willing to take Ted until his mother was better was very evident, but to her discomfiture Lonnie perceived that no one was willing to have her. It was difficult for her to believe—as she had always supposed that she was a far superior person to Ted, and in every way more desirable. She had always received more attention and compliments in ten minutes than Ted would receive in a month—and now no one wanted her.

“She’s bright, and she’s pretty, poor little thing, but I won’t have her with my children.”

“And I won’t have her, though I have no children; she’d drive me crazy.”

“Well, I don’t want her goin’ along the street

drinkin' the milk out of my pitcher, I can tell you !”

“She’s too flyabout for me to put up with !”

“Well, friends, she’s no kin to Mrs. Lakin,” said one woman, “and we all know Mrs. Lakin has no right to have her to her hurt. Now’s the time to help matters. I can make out to keep her over night, and if some of you’ll mind my Benny to-morrow, I’ll take her down to the Associates, and get her into a Home, or somewheres, and we’ll be rid of her, and she’ll be better off a heap than with Mrs. Lakin.”

Lonnie had been angry enough to cry for some time past. She never had liked Mrs. Cook, because Mrs. Cook had not admired her, and because she would not let her play with Bennie, and now Mrs. Cook was the only one to offer any help.

Lonnie, with lightning rapidity, thought of the various things she might do on this occasion. She might scream ; that was what she preferred ; but her unfailing instinct told her that screaming at that moment would only

bring down more disapproval upon her unlucky head. She could fuss and refuse to go with Mrs. Cook; but that was useless, worse than useless. So she went very quietly, repressing a sob, to Mrs. Cook's side, and, to her astonishment, received a smile of encouragement from that well-meaning woman.

It was so late that every one felt it necessary to get within doors as soon as possible.

Ted went with Tom, more taken up in the first excitement with his own change of location than with his mother's misfortune.

Mrs. Cook led Lonnie to her rooms, the prettiest and neatest in the court, and congratulated herself that she would surely be rid of the child by the next noon. Lonnie was already wondering if she could in any way escape that terrible sentence of a Home. When they entered the room Bennie was roaring lustily; the neighbor's child, who had promised to stay with him, had left him, and he did not like his own exclusive company. Mrs. Cook's face lengthened; there she was with Bennie in a temper, and the table

not set, and little sign of supper to appease her husband's annoyance when he should find Lonnie there, and Lonnie disgracefully dirty.

"There, take the basin and wash your face anyway, if you know how." Then she picked up the struggling two-year-old and tried to make a start at setting the table.

Lonnie perceived the dilemma with real interest. She washed herself as quickly and as well as she possibly could, and left things in the sink as she found them. Then in her pleasantest tones,—and never had a child a sweeter voice than Lonnie,—she said she could amuse Bennie.

Mrs. Cook set him down on the floor, expecting to be rewarded by a still louder scream ; but Lonnie was ready for him ; and in less than a minute his voice rang out with a shout of laughter. Mrs. Cook's face brightened and her table setting and her supper sped along rapidly, so that by the time her husband came home things looked more comfortable than usual, Bennie was happy instead of fretting as he generally did at that time in the evening, and Mrs.

Cook, as a natural consequence, was minus her customary expression of weariness. The Walnut Court doings were detailed and listened to with relish as Mrs. Cook put on the supper, so that Lonnie took her place at the table beside Bennie somewhat with the air of the heroine of a tragedy. She did not permit even the mention of that despised Home to make her scowl, and she proved so entertaining to Bennie at the various crises of his meal that that function passed off without the ordinary upheaval.

Supper over, Mrs. Cook's face again clouded. If Bennie was not very soon put to bed he would begin his nightly uproar, and if she left the supper dishes standing things looked so mussy her husband didn't like it, and if she did the dishes and asked her husband to undress Bennie, he would acquiesce in such an injured way that she would feel depressed the whole evening.

"I can clear up and do the dishes. I saw where you got everything," said Lonnie, "I can do it good."

"You're too little," said Mrs. Cook, looking doubtfully at the bit of a child.

"Oh, I can do it!"

"You'll break things!"

"No, I won't break a thing. I've been learned better."

"Well, try it," and Mrs. Cook sat down with a more comfortable feeling than she had experienced for months, to undress Bennie and even to take time to play with him, and have him show his tricks to his father, who admired the boy very much when some one else was responsible for him.

Lonnie exercised the greatest judgment. She made as little noise as possible. The things she could not guess what to do with she placed in an unobtrusive row on the back of a table and covered. She rubbed her dishes until they shone and climbed on a chair to put them away in the dish closet.

By the time Bennie was asleep and Mr. Cook was dozing over his newspaper the dish department was so well arranged that it only took

Mrs. Cook a very few minutes to finish up everything.

“You certainly are a mighty smart little girl! Why don’t you act as good all the time?”

“Mighty smart” was a new phrase to Lonnie’s ears, and she meditated on it while she said she would be good all the time when anybody made her. The answer seemed to Mrs. Cook to convey so delicate a compliment that she felt quite compassionate toward the child.

That night, after Lonnie was sound asleep in her improvised bed on the floor, Mrs. Cook asked her husband to look at her.

“Well, she is a pretty little thing,” he said. “I never noticed how pretty she was, though I knew she was sassy enough.”

“She’s the most aggravating child in the court,” said Mrs. Cook, “but it’s just wonderful how Bennie does take to her, and how good she can work; must be nature, for I’m sure Mrs. Lakin wouldn’t actually show anybody decent ways.”

“I expect, now, if she had somebody like you

to look after her she'd be a real nice child. If you want her to stay around to help you, and heed Bennie for a while, I sha'n't mind."

"I always thought she was too naughty to be near Bennie, but perhaps she would do better," and Mrs. Cook in turn thought longingly of the relief it would be to have somebody quiet that awful noise Bennie could make when he wanted her to play with him and she was obliged to sew or work.

"I can see how she does to-morrow. I s'pose I'm not obliged to trot her off first thing, like I planned."

The next morning when Lonnie woke, roused by Mrs. Cook moving around, she felt a supreme satisfaction at hearing the rain splashing against the window.

"If I'm useful as can be, I don't believe she'll take me to that Home in the rain," and with notable care and dexterity she managed to pull her stockings on straight and get all her buttons buttoned; her ablutions were quite searching, and her use of the fragment of comb unsparing.

“ Well, you do look real neat, to be sure ! ” ejaculated Mrs. Cook ; “ and folded up your bed-clothes, too. I don’t see why you don’t behave all the time when you know how so well. Folks would think a heap better of you.”

“ Well, I mean to turn over a new leaf—beginning with Monday,” was the satisfied answer. “ I can set the table for you.”

Then when Bennie called, his mother hastily brought him, wrapped in a shawl, to the kitchen stove, and Lonnie amused him instead of Mr. Cook being kept on the jump, to his disgust, while trying to dress himself; and between Lonnie’s watching the biscuits, and stirring the potatoes, and wheedling Bennie, the little fellow was entirely dressed without the hand-to-hand scuffle that ordinarily took place before breakfast could be eaten.

Lonnie’s tongue was of the rattling kind, but she was keeping it very silent; when it was impossible to prevent it entirely from breaking loose, she directed it with judgment.

“Bennie is the prettiest little boy in Boston, isn’t he!”

“How smart he is! There isn’t another little boy in this street half so smart, and large, and nice as he is!”

“How good he is! I just love him!”

People did not ordinarily call Bennie good, and the words were as balm to Mrs. Cook’s soul, even though spoken by the good-for-nothing Lonnie.

Bennie’s conduct was so much ameliorated, and the comfort of breakfast time so much improved in consequence by Lonnie’s fascinating ways of diverting him, that when Mr. Cook, dinner-pail in hand, started for his work he privately advised his wife to wait until the next day at least before taking Lonnie away.

The neighbor who had agreed to take care of Bennie while Mrs. Cook went on her mission came to the door to see how soon she would start, and Lonnie, rocking Bennie to sleep in his basket cradle, listened with all her ears for the reply.

"Seeing as it's raining, I thought if she didn't make me trouble," replied the cautious Mrs. Cook, knowing Lonnie could hear, "I'd keep her till this afternoon or mayhap to-morrow."

"It's real good of you, I'm sure," said the neighbor, "and her so troublesome, too. I hope she ain't worried you all to death."

"No; she's been very good—good as any child."

"Do tell! If she'd only be good she'd be a real help to some families, and be sure of a good home; but nobody that knows her wants to try her. No, I can't come in. Hope Bennie's doing well. Good-by!"

"I'll just show what I can do when it comes to bein' useful," thought Lonnie vindictively.

Bennie was asleep and Mrs. Cook was preparing to get out her umbrella and rubbers.

"If you're going to buy things you needn't to go out in the rain. I can go all right. You tell me what you want, and you don't have to write it down, nor nothing. I'll get just what

you want; and Mrs. Lakin said I could buy better'n she could."

After some discussion Mrs. Cook, who hated to go out in the rain, handed over her purse and her directions.

"Oh, do you pay money for your things?" asked Lonnie in astonishment. "It's easy enough to buy things with money!"

The small messenger trudged forth and returned later, red-cheeked and smiling, with every purchase exactly right, the change right to a cent, and withal with a budget of the most entertaining items relative to the court, which passed away a good share of the morning in the detailing and commenting thereupon.

"Why, Lonnie, you're real good company," said Mrs. Cook as she looked at the clock; "I wouldn't suppose you could be such a good talker; that's right, build up them blocks for Bennie; he dearly loves to knock 'em down, and I must get his little coat finished."

"It's such a pretty coat. You must be a wonderful sewer," ventured Lonnie.

"I like to sew. I wish Bennie was a little girl, so I could teach him to sew. If I wasn't going to take you away I'd make you a dress and some nice gingham aprons."

"My! I never had a new apron, I guess."

"It's a pity you've acted so noisy since Mrs. Lakin came to live in the court, so as to turn everybody against you. You could have a good home if it wasn't for that."

"I had to do something. If somebody'd taught me to sew nice, and I'd had a new apron, p'r'aps I'd been nice."

Mrs. Cook smiled, but said nothing.

Lonnie was ready to amuse the insatiable Bennie when he awoke, and his mother took real pleasure in finishing the little coat in peace. The few lunch dishes were turned over to Lonnie with success, and when Bennie was again asleep she voluntarily amused herself by polishing every tin, brass, copper or nickel object in the three rooms, and without making a muss.

"That's the smartest child I ever saw in my

life," thought Mrs. Cook, "and I haven't had such peace since Bennie was born, that I haven't." She felt so cheerful that she prepared an extra treat for supper, the pleasure being enhanced by Lonnie's outspoken interest. The second evening was, if anything, an improvement on the first, and Mr. Cook so appreciated the ability to delegate his position as evening nurse to Lonnie that he again said he thought they had better keep her for a while, and his wife secretly rejoiced.

Lonnie watched narrowly the next morning for signs of the trip to the Home, but nothing was said or done. It was a beautiful day and she begged to wheel Bennie in his wagon, promising to be "just as careful as could be." Mrs. Cook rather reluctantly consented, but as she watched Bennie's face grow bright and rosy in the fresh air, and saw the truly exemplary manner in which Lonnie paced decorously over the allotted stretch, she subsided into a feeling of relaxation and enjoyed another two hours of sewing.

“I’d get the sewing all done up and have a beautiful time if she would just behave herself. I’ll tell her that I’ll try her and take her to get the aprons, and put her little duds through the wash-tub to-night while she’s in bed.”

So while they were having their lunch Mrs. Cook began with some solemnity: “You’ve been a real, good, industrious little girl this two days, Lonnie, and if you would keep on behaving so well I’d be willing to let you stay for a while. I was going to take you right off to a Home, but if you want to be a good girl and help me I’ll get you the aprons and let you stay here.”

Lonnie was in a tumult of joy; exactly why she could not have told; but uppermost in her thoughts were the escape from the Home, the aprons, and the firm belief that this would show everybody in Walnut Court that she was a very useful child, and that every one of them had missed something by not taking her.

“There now, Ted, somebody does want me,” she said triumphantly to Ted the first time she

saw him after their separation. "I'm not going to a Home at all! The Cooks just couldn't get along without me, and I'm to stay there!"

"Mrs. Cook!" and Ted gave a low whistle.

He well knew that Mrs. Cook had the reputation of being the most unnecessarily particular person in all Walnut Court.

"When did she tell you?"

"This afternoon."

"Sho! It won't be two days before you think you own the earth again, and then where'll you be? I'm selling papers!"

"Oh!" enviously. "I wish I did. I just hate staying in the house."

Lonnie already loved Bennie with all her little warm heart; he was so pretty, and so openly delighted with her, and his mother kept him so sweet and clean. But Lonnie was far from being satisfied with the way his mother treated him. Mrs. Cook had a great many good theories as to the way a baby should be brought up in regard to its food and sleep. The only babies Lonnie knew anything about slept when they

were sleepy, and ate when they were hungry whatever could be most easily procured at the moment. To see Bennie want things at the table and not get them seemed to Lonnie disgraceful. He did not have any candy, nor any cake. Lonnie quite boiled with wrath at the thought of such stinginess. She had never seen a baby before whose caretaker was not perfectly willing to give it pie, and cake, and candy, and pickles, if such things were to be had.

“I’ll feed him up good if I get a chance,” thought Lonnie. “Here I’ve been sent to buy this and that and the other every day, and paying cash! Such a way to do! and Bennie with never a bit of anything nice. I’ll just charge up something and take the money and feed him up. Then we’ll see!”

CHAPTER III

AN UNLUCKY FEAST

THE next day Lonnie charged up fifteen cents' worth of meat at the butcher's, and, hurrying home with her meat and other purchases, began sympathetically to Mrs. Cook:

"Now, you want to go to the big stores to do your errands, and why don't you go when you put the meat on? I'll wheel Bennie in his wagon nice as can be, and it's beautiful out. He's looking real well since he rides out every day."

"Will you wheel him just where I tell you?"

"Don't I always? Do you think I'd hurt Bennie?"

Mrs. Cook believed her implicitly, thinking to herself, "There's one good thing about Lonnie, she just loves Bennie."

So Mrs. Cook went on her errands and her

last sight of Bennie was of a very joyful little boy indeed, in his new coat and cap, riding in his wagon, while Lonnie waved an encouraging good-by.

Then away went Lonnie and the wagon, and the fifteen cents, to the baker's. She bought two cream-puffs, and, sitting on a convenient step, devoured one, while Bennie had the other.

"Good, ain't it, Bennie? Your mother don't know how to give you a good time. It's lucky I fixed the bag on you or you'd be a pretty sight. Now, come on, and we'll get a bottle of pop, and you can have half."

And on another step further down Cambridge Street she managed to pour some of the delectable pop down his throat, and the rest down her own. "My! but that's worth while!" she said. "This beats everything!"

After returning the bottle she went back to her regular patrol, and was there pleasantly smiling on Mrs. Cook's return.

"Well, you have been a good girl," said Mrs. Cook. "I brought you a stick of peppermint."

“Oh, how nice! I’ll give half to Bennie.”

“You’re a nice child to want to, but I daren’t let Bennie have any; he’s got such a weak stomach, some way.”

About the middle of the afternoon Bennie seemed listless and ailing. He refused to play and lay back in his mother’s arms. Then his face became flushed and he was in a rapidly increasing fever. His mother wrung her hands.

“Oh! what shall I do? He’s had two of ’em before and they run so mortal high!”

She tried all the simple remedies she knew, Lonnie getting everything for her, and being so quiet and dexterous that Mrs. Cook could not help saying:

“I don’t know what I’d ’a’ done without you, Lonnie. You’re that capable.”

When Mr. Cook came home he was dispatched straightway for a doctor. The doctor very unhesitatingly declared that the child had had something injurious to eat, left some powders to allay his fever, said he should have

nothing to eat but beef juice, and, promising to call in the morning, he departed.

“Lonnie, did any of the neighbors give Bennie anything to eat this morning?” asked Mrs. Cook.

“Oh, no!”

“Did you?”

“Oh, Mrs. Cook!”

“Of course you couldn’t, not having anything to give him.”

Mr. Cook went to the butcher’s for the beef, and as he mechanically paid for it the butcher said, jocosely, “So you’re going to begin charging things?”

“Charging things!”

“Yes; Lonnie charged up fifteen cents to-day.”

“What do you mean?”

The butcher opened his book. “Thursday, boiling meat, fifteen cents.”

“Well, that ends her!” said Mr. Cook grimly, and paying the bill strode out.

At home he found a neighbor volubly talking.

“So he is sick? Well, I said to myself when I saw that sight, ‘now we’ll know if he can stand that, that his stomach’s as good as anybody’s.’ Her a-pouring that pop down his blessed little throat; and when I went into the baker’s for a few biscuit Mis’ Thomas said as how Lonnie was mighty flush buyin’ sweet stuffs. Well, we all told you she was a bad lot. However, if I can’t be of use I won’t be takin’ your time. Good-night to you all. Bennie’ll be all chipper in the morning. That’s the way children are! Don’t worry. When you’ve raised six the way I have, and lost two—rest ’em—it won’t look so new to you! Good-night!”

Bennie had fallen into a fitful sleep. Lonnie had made herself as small as possible behind the stove. Mr. Cook pulled off his heavy shoes and remarked dryly, “That child’s goin’ to-morrow.”

“I know she is,” answered Mrs. Cook.

“Oh! oh!” began Lonnie, “I’ll be good! I’ll never, never do such a bad thing again! Oh, oh! I’ll turn over a new leaf! Oh, I’ve been learned a lesson! Oh! —”

“Stop that right now!” was Mr. Cook’s unmoved answer. “You’ve done mischief enough without making such a racket. You stole and you told untruths, and I don’t keep such in my house. I don’t want to hear another word from you while I’m in this house—not one.”

From the tone of his voice Lonnie perceived that he meant it, and sitting miserably behind the stove began to count the clock’s ticks, which she continued to do until she was sent to bed.

CHAPTER IV

AT THE HOME

As Mrs. Cook could not leave Bennie the next morning, Lonnie was confided to the not precisely tender mercies of one Mrs. Brent, a woman regarded by her neighbors as one not easily downed and as very likely to succeed in anything she undertook.

“You’ve lost a good home, Lonnie,” said Mrs. Cook at parting, “and if you have a spark of conscience in you, you won’t need any one to tell you how wicked you’ve been. Now, the next chance you get to behave yourself, and make friends, you’d better make more of it. Good-by, I wish you well.”

“I’m thankful for one thing,” sobbed Lonnie, “you’ve learned me a good lesson; and I do hope Bennie’ll be feelin’ better and won’t miss me.”

And Mrs. Cook, with delightful inconsistency, went back to her rooms and wept quite bitterly for a moment or two over the pretty little girl, and over her own shattered dream of Lonnie as a real help and credit, and of the neighbors' admiration of the child's miraculous improvement.

"Hope you're satisfied with your week's work, you young limb," was Mrs. Brent's method of consolation. "There's Ted. He's lived same way you have, and he's a nice, well-behaved little boy. Well, we'll see what will become of you, and it won't be a very edifyin' sight either, I'm thinkin'."

It was far from being an enjoyable day. After seemingly endless questions, a great deal of red tape, and any amount of suspicion, Mrs. Brent was relieved of her charge and Lonnie was confided to a worn-looking woman of the understrapper type, who was to take her, when opportunity came, to a Home where there was supposed to be a vacancy. Lonnie tried weeping once, but it did not seem to elicit much

sympathy; and on the whole she was too well entertained by the people coming and going, and by a banana her protector bestowed upon her, to care to prolong it. If she could only have forgotten the Home she would have felt very well satisfied. But the thought of it filled her with resentment. She was firmly resolved as to her course. She would run away just as quickly as she possibly could. She felt sure that in Walnut Court every one was saying what a bad little girl she was and how no one wanted her; and Ted would say he told her just what would happen.

It was dark when they reached the Home, not a large affair at all, a plain brick building, just like all the other houses in the row. They were ushered into a hall, not very warm, with the gas turned low, and with the floor covered with oil-cloth. From that moment Lonnie hated oil-cloth, especially oil-cloth smelling of recent washing.

Next they sat an interminable ten minutes in a little ante-room, which had a crayon portrait

hanging on each wall, and a table, with two books on top, standing in the centre. A short-haired girl in a brown check apron came in to turn up the dimly-burning gas. There was a muffled sound of dishes rattling and of footsteps on bare floors, which intimated that some part of the building was occupied.

In the course of time a rather stout, fresh-faced woman, in a black dress and white apron, came in and listened intently to Lonnie's escort. The proper order was displayed, and, after a series of questions, counterparts of several sets Lonnie had already heard that day, the escort departed and the matron told Lonnie to follow her.

"What is your name, child?"

"Lonnie Lakin."

"Your real name, I mean. What does Lonnie stand for?"

"Nothin'," defiantly.

The matron eyed her narrowly. "If you mean to be naughty here you won't have a very good time, and will do yourself no good; but if

you are pleasant and obedient you will enjoy yourself, and it may turn out greatly to your advantage."

She did not try to say anything more to her, and presently, leading her into a very clean bath-room, rang a bell. Two large girls of about sixteen, both short-haired and wearing brown check aprons, answered the summons.

They seemed to know what was expected of them without being told.

"Do your work thoroughly, girls, and get size seven for her. See if you can't say a good word."

"Do you belong in this Home?" asked Lonnie after the matron's departure.

"Yes."

"How long you been here?"

"I've been here eleven years, and she's been here nine. My name is Mary and her's is Kate."

"My gracious! And you're alive yet? Do they keep every one that long?"

The girls both laughed, and Mary said, while rapidly undressing Lonnie, "No, indeed. This

is a Home where the children don't stay very long. It's only girls, except a few boy babies, and people come here to adopt children. Some times they aren't here more than a week."

"How'd you come to be here so long?"

"Oh! that's easy," laughed Mary. "Folks always pick out the pretty children, and we were both so mortal homely nobody wanted us. And when we got past the adopting age we were both so extra nice and useful they kept us here to work instead of getting us places. Isn't that so, Kate?"

Kate gave a grunt of assent, which could scarcely be heard above the running water.

"Well, I'm pretty enough," said Lonnie.

"Oh, yes! You're pretty enough, if that's all there is to it. How old are you?"

"Ten, I guess. Why?"

"Folks don't take children over nine, generally; but you're extra small."

"Quit washing me so hard!"

"We have to, you're the dirtiest sort of a child."

"I washed myself day before yesterday," indignantly.

"You made an extra poor job of it, if you did. When ever did you do it before that?"

"I don't know ; never, I guess."

"That's my guess, too."

The rehabilitation in clean garments was rather pleasing to Lonnie, but she felt a distinct aversion to the gray woollen dress and brown checked apron on the chair.

"What you going to cut my hair for?"

"Always have to ; heads are always dirty, and that's the quickest way."

"But I don't want my hair cut !"

"Well, we will give you the long cut. When hair is curly we give the long cut, and when it's straight the short cut. Every single child looks better after we have cut their hair and shampooed their heads. Fact !"

"I've heard folks starves children in these Homes."

"Yes, all the children that come, most, have

heard that. It don't take them long to fatten up, though. You're fat enough already."

"What do they give you? I've heard it was always the same thing."

"Pretty near. Want to know what, or had you rather wait and find out?"

"Rather know now."

"That's where you're foolish. But I'll tell you. We have oatmeal and milk for breakfast, and Sunday morning bread and molasses extra. Suppers, we have brown bread and milk in summer, and cornmeal pudding and milk in winter. Cornmeal's begun again now. For dinner we always have a soup, and potatoes, and some vegetable, and Sundays and Wednesdays some meat, and Sundays a pudding. We'll be late for supper and we three will eat alone. That will be fun."

"What do they do all day?"

"The best behaved ones that are old enough go to school; and the others have school here in the school-room from nine till twelve, and the rest of the time, except play time, they work."

“Work!” in great horror.

“All the fresh ones are put right off to wiping stairs, and they have to wipe stairs until they can do the stairs and the banisters exactly right.”

“I don’t believe that would be very much fun,” and Lonnie put her head on one side and looked so judicially critical that Mary and Kate both burst out laughing.

“You know, I don’t like minding very well,” went on Lonnie confidentially. “I never had to mind anybody ’cept Mrs. Cook, and only just Mrs. Lakin when she started for me with a broom or something. She didn’t expect me to mind only then, and then I just hustled.”

“You better try to mind here before you are punished; that’s the easiest way. And I hope you will like to mind me, for I suppose you will be in my room.”

“What’s that mean?”

Kate and I each have a room with several beds in it for middle-sized children, and I suppose you’ll be in my room. The babies and

little ones are in a couple of nurseries, and the older ones have a room. This is just a small Home."

Lonnie was beginning to feel very much pleased with the Home, and though she had meant to be quite miserable and gloomy, she found her spirits rising to their highest pitch.

Mary shook her head meaningly at the smiling Kate as they noticed the lively look in Lonnie's eyes and the energy of all her movements.

Having supper alone with Mary and Kate was not in the least awe-inspiring, and in spite of themselves they could not help laughing at the ridiculous antics of the new-comer. Kate could laugh in a more heart-free way, however, than Mary, for Kate was not the one to wrestle with her that night.

When Lonnie found herself in Mary's room with several other little girls her spirits went up another notch. Other little new girls always acted in a shy and lonesome manner, if not tearful, the first night; but Lonnie was mightily taken with the whole arrangement.

At the breakfast table Lonnie evinced a perfect genius for raising surreptitious giggles at her end of the table.

“Children,” said the matron—Aunt Jane, every one was taught to call her—“if you feel like laughing, laugh; don’t snicker and giggle as if you were ashamed.” But it was useless.

After breakfast the matron called Lonnie to her in a way that made some of the more timid children quite pale with apprehension.

“Now, my child,” said the matron with judicial severity, “Mary has told me of your conduct in her room last night, and I have seen your conduct this morning at the table. You are making a mistake. You forget that you are only one among a number. We must all of us act, not for ourselves alone, but with consideration for all the rest. Now don’t try to make trouble, dear; just try to make things pleasanter for your being here.”

“Oh, I like it here ever so much!” said Lonnie, brightly. “It’s pleasant enough for me!”

“I’m glad you like it,” said the matron, trying not to smile, “and I hope you will try to make us like you. Come, now, and I will show you your work during work hours.”

She took her to the three-story staircase and gave her an oiled dust-cloth. “You are to rub the steps, every inch of them, tread and molding and sides, and the stair-boards and the railing, hard and clean. Not only must you not have any dust, but you must polish them. Just as soon as you can do a flight satisfactorily you will be given your turn at other kinds of work.”

“Will other children be doing the other kinds of work, too?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, goody! All right! I’ll have this done in no time! I’ll be all ready for you when you come!”

Then she set to work like a little madcap, rubbing, and wiping, and singing, sputtering and talking to herself. The ceilings were not very high, and before the school-bell rang,

Lonnie had wriggled and rubbed her way from top to bottom.

“Now for cleaning the banister rail,” she said with a satisfied chuckle, and running clear to the third story she fastened her duster to her as a sort of a pennant, settled herself firmly on the rail, and slid down to the landing. “There, that’s clean, and I guess I’ll clean it some more that way!”

Down the next she went, and when the matron came out into the lower hall to take Lonnie to the school-room, she was greeted by the sight of a brown check bundle whizzing down the lower stair rail, bump into the newel post.

“Hello! You here!” puffed Lonnie, catching her breath, her red cheeks redder than ever, and her pretty half curly short hair looking anything but plastered down.

“I’m cleaning the railing! Just see the stairs! Don’t they shine! How do you like ’em? What’s the next work? Making pies? Cake? Going errands? I’m ready.”

The matron thought of a dozen things to say, but they all seemed so unequal to the occasion that she simply said, "You mustn't slide down the banisters again, it's not safe. Come to the school-room now."

Full of curiosity Lonnie went into the school-room, a sunny, cheerful place with plants and blackboards and pictures, and several rows of clean-looking little brown check aproned girls.

Lonnie's entrance had the effect of a charge of electricity. All the children became at once restless and wide awake, and do what she would, Miss West, the teacher, found that her influence was at its lowest ebb, and that morning was the hardest she ever passed at the Home. She couldn't say exactly what Lonnie had done, either.

At dinner the matron's attention was directed particularly toward Lonnie, and none of the little attentions Lonnie bestowed on her neighbors escaped her notice. That end of the table was in a regular gale. Finally, when Lonnie snapped a crust of bread with unerring aim at

the nose of her *vis-a-vis*, one of the nurses, a large strong woman, picked her up quietly and before Lonnie could expostulate placed her in a bare, well-lighted closet and bolted the door.

“If that don’t beat all!” murmured Lonnie. “Me having such a good time, and making it so pleasant and nice for our end of the table, and then here I am!” and then she laughed to think how funny Alice looked when the crust hit her. “If they’re going to act so mean I’ll have to sit quieter, for I sure don’t like this.”

That night in Mary’s room, when Lonnie was getting all ready for some more fun, Mary caught her and held her firmly in her lap.

“See here! You are very silly; don’t you know this is an adopting home? If anybody came to adopt a child and wanted you, Aunt Jane would have to say you were dreadfully troublesome, and they wouldn’t take you. It won’t do you a bit of good to be pretty if you don’t act well; but if you do act well it would be worth a lot to you—a nice home and nice things, perhaps.”

“My!” ejaculated Lonnie; then she added with a nice little smile, “but I am sure I would rather stay here with you. you are so kind.”

“Oh, you little monkey!” laughed Mary. “I wouldn’t rather have you if you don’t act better; you got me a scolding last night, and I didn’t like it much.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry! I’ll show that old Aunt Jane!”

“Mercy, child, do keep still! She’s the best friend I have in the world. It’s you you’d better show!”

“Well, I’ll show me then!” and she behaved as well as possible that evening.

The general impression throughout the Home, however, was that Lonnie could create more disturbance than any other child who had ever been there.

She had been there only a little over a week when a carriage and pair, with gold-mounted harness and liveried coachman and footman, drove up to the door. The news spread through

the school like wildfire. The matron had been expecting some one and was bristling with importance, and could not avoid giving a sort of finishing pat to every child she passed.

A lady and gentleman entered the Home, and such a lady and such a gentleman! And they were coming to hunt a child! Never had such a splendid chance opened up before. If the children could have had their way they would have rushed in a body shrieking, "Take me!" But they all knew enough to go about their ordinary avocations as diligently as might be.

The visitors did not see Lonnie until they reached the school-room. She looked up, as did the others, at their arrival.

"Oh, Charles! what a perfectly lovely child!" exclaimed the lady; "we must have that one! Oh, who is she?" to the matron. They moved up near Lonnie's desk. Her shortened, rather disorderly golden brown curls, her rosy cheeks, and long eyelashes, and soft brown eyes, and pretty little nose and mouth and chin, and white, even teeth, were all noted by the lady's

quick eye. "Charles, she's perfect; we just must have her, the darling!"

"She is pretty," replied the matron, somewhat hesitatingly.

"Is she kind and honest, and does she want to do the way you wish to have her?"

"Why, we all like her already. She has only been here a week. I couldn't say positively about her."

"Come," said the gentleman, smiling, "she has been troublesome; own up!"

"Yes, she has been troublesome," confessed the matron, "but she doesn't know everything yet."

"Now, Helen," whispered the gentleman, persuasively, to his wife, "don't fly in the face of Providence. Let's stick to that little tot in the nursery. She certainly isn't troublesome."

"She was the sweetest little darling in the world, I admit," and they turned away.

Lonnie had heard every word and it was all she could do to keep the scalding tears from

dropping down on her slate. Oh, that gold harness, and those lovely rings on the lady's hands, and that beautiful bonnet! She could have yelled. Why hadn't she been good and made friends with the matron? Then the matron would have praised her, and she would have gone in that elegant carriage, and how the children would have stared—oh!

Once more the lady, being led by Mary to the nursery, passed Lonnie on the stairs.

"Is that child troublesome, as the matron seemed to think?" asked the lady.

Lonnie held her breath. Wouldn't Mary praise her?

"She's a dear little soul, I think; but my, my! the life she leads us all! The day just isn't long enough to keep up with her. But I pretty near love her."

"Poor little thing," said the lady, and, going back, she patted Lonnie's head. "I know you are a nice little girl, dear, and I am sure you aren't a bit troublesome. If you will just care a little more about what your friends wish they

will be able to say even kinder things than they do of you."

"Oh, I'm just l-l-lovely good!" sobbed Lonnie.

"I am sure of it. Good-by, dear."

The whole affair was even more strongly borne in upon Lonnie when a dimpled little two-year-old from the nursery was brought into the dining-room at dinner time for a farewell. All the children rose and called out "Good-by" and "Good wishes." The lady and gentleman smiled good-by, and the baby, in the arms of the nurse who had been waiting in the carriage, was driven away. Prancing horses, gold harness, liveried coachman—good-by, everything! and Lonnie could scarcely keep the tears back.

CHAPTER V

AUNT JANE

THE very next morning the matron was so unfortunate as to slip on the basement stairs and twist her ankle. It was necessary that she should remain quietly in her room, if such a thing were possible, for a week at least.

She knew that everything would probably go on smoothly during her retirement, but she wanted some one to wait on her and keep her informed as to how everything was going in all parts of the house and to carry messages for her. Lonnie heard Mary wondering to Kate whom the matron would pick out, and quick as a flash she darted along the hall to the matron's room, pushed her head through the partly open door, and seeing the matron alone, mournfully contemplating her bandaged ankle, began eagerly, "Please choose me to wait on

you. I'll do everything exactly right, and be just as quiet, you can't think! And I never forget a message, and I won't get a thing twisted! I just love accidents and sick people!"

She waited, her eyes round with excitement, and the matron laughed with amusement at her eagerness.

"Yes, I'll choose you if you like. If you don't behave I'll have to change, but if you can do what I say I shall be glad to keep you. Go to Mary for a clean apron. Tell her to have Nurse Bates see that Mollie Jay's throat is looked after, and tell Kate to come to me at four o'clock, and see if there is any mail, and bring me a glass of water."

"Yes'm," smiled Lonnie, and the matron thought that if she did half those things she would keep her

The clean apron, the mail, and the water came back promptly, and later events proved that the messages had been accurately delivered. What was more, the matron soon discovered that no matter how many things she told Lonnie to

get, or do, or say, Lonnie never asked her to repeat, and never failed to remember every item.

“Lonnie has a regular knack for doing things,” she admitted. Her tea and cocoa were never spilled when Lonnie brought them, though they always were when any one else did it. When Lonnie straightened the room, things had a neat, pretty air that was quite beyond any other person’s arrangement. She seemed to know when the matron was dozing—and the good woman dozed many a half-hour in her unaccustomed retirement, and could keep quiet. She could sing the most ordinary little songs in the sweetest voice imaginable, and the items she told concerning the goings on in the house from basement to attic surpassed in interest what every one else told her put together.

“She certainly is a child of remarkable qualities,” admitted the matron. “I feel sorry she did not show them before. For Mrs. Rossington certainly did take a great fancy to Lonnie, and if I could have spoken as well of her as I can now would perhaps have chosen her. However, I

think she did better for herself to take Tottie. I hope so."

"What would you like to be, Lonnie?"

"A lady."

"But I mean to earn your living?"

"I don't want to earn my living."

"You will probably have to."

"No, I want to be a lady, and not do a thing but drive around."

One afternoon the matron asked Lonnie to go to her trunk and get her a small inlaid cedar box. Lonnie did so, and the matron then excused her for an hour to go and help in the nursery.

"I would just like to know what was in that box," thought Lonnie. "It was a pretty box. Maybe there was gum in it. Maybe there was dimonts in it. I'll look next time she asks me to get it out for her or put it back."

At the end of the hour she returned to the matron's room.

"Put the box back where you got it, Lonnie, and then sit quietly with that picture-book."

Lonnie took the box and on the way to the trunk tried to open the lid, but it was not an ordinary box, and did not open in an ordinary way. Making a desperate effort to slide the cover she cracked it.

“What’s that?” sharply asked the matron.

“I was trying to see how your box opened and I cracked it. I’m awful sorry.”

The matron’s face flushed violently. A woman of marked self-control, no one who knew her would have supposed that so trifling an incident could have moved her so much. But her treasure had been desecrated. That little box, the few things in it, constituted for her a very Holy of Holies—the something that held her by a golden thread to the golden glory of her youth. Practical, efficient, well poised, satisfied with her life, and in a place eminently suited to her, there was that in her past which was in itself hallowed, and which in a sense hallowed for her all her common lot since then.

The one spot where she could be sorely wounded had been taken as a target by Lonnie.

“Bring it here!”

Lonnie brought it, conscious that the matron was bitterly incensed.

“Did you open it?”

“No’m; I couldn’t get it open. I just wish you’d take the poker to me! Shall I get it for you?”

The tenseness of the matron’s face and tone relaxed. After all, it hadn’t been opened.

“You surely didn’t open it?”

“No’m!” in astonishment. “I don’t see how you do it!”

“Don’t you know it’s wicked to meddle?”

“I’d ought to know it,” shamefacedly. “I won’t do it again.”

“Help me turn where I can see you, and then you must put it back. I am terribly disappointed in you, Lonnie.”

Lonnie looked as though she might be going to cry when Kate came to the door and asked if she could show in Miss Joyce.

“Yes, certainly; you may wait here, Lonnie.”

In came Miss Joyce, and Lonnie gave a

cry of surprise and delight when she saw it was the lady who had given her the five-cent piece.

“Do you know this child, Miss Joyce?” asked the matron.

“No-o. I don’t think so. But she looks familiar.”

“Oh, you do know me! You gave me five cents on Cambridge Street, by Walnut Court—me and Ted; and we bought licorish, and Ted’s mother, she had her leg broke!”

“I do remember,” said Miss Joyce smiling. “She looked so near weeping when I entered, Miss Harding, I thought sure you were dealing with a culprit.”

“So I was,” was the rather grim reply, and she sketched in the situation.

“Wasn’t I dreadful?” sighed Lonnie. “Now I hear it told, it doesn’t seem as though I could have been so mean to anybody. And do you know, Miss Joyce,” seriously, “I really was meaning to behave mighty well for Aunt Jane, now she’s laid up. I never acted so well for

anybody in my life. For I like this Home, and Aunt Jane, and Kate, and Mary, and everybody, and I've made the most trouble you ever heard of right along—just having a good time. And I thought I'd make up for being so troublesome by being terrible useful, and now see what I've been an' gone an' done!"

She stopped, quite breathless, and the matron was surprised to find that her animosity toward Lonnie was practically extinct.

"She has been good, Miss Joyce—really—I never saw such a smart, capable, quick, useful little girl as Lonnie in all my life."

"Oh, my!" thought Lonnie. "Now, if she was looking for a little girl that would be saying pretty nice things of me, wouldn't it!"

Lonnie was excused from further attendance, and Miss Joyce, one of the directors of the Home, made known her errand. Her house was empty at the time except for herself and the maid, and she had stopped to see if there was any one she could take out with her for a week or so. It was something she often did, and if there

was any child who seemed in need of a change for any reason that was the child chosen.

“Now, I will just take Lonnie, if you are willing,” said Miss Joyce. “It will give you a rest, and I rather think we shall enjoy having her. I believe there is an application in from a fine farm out a little way that will be just the thing for that child ; she needs to be where there is considerable activity.”

“Oh, she could do the activity part herself, anywhere,” was the matron’s hasty comment.

In the course of an hour, Lonnie, glowingly happy, rode away with Miss Joyce in her phaeton.

CHAPTER VI

BROOKLINE

ON the drive home Miss Joyce found herself becoming greatly interested in the little red-cheeked dot by her side. Lonnie was secretly rejoiced at the appearance of the whip and the robe, which seemed to her to bespeak a certain elegance, though she was sorry there was no gold plate on the harness. She resorted to her most babyfied air, which had always seemed to be effective, and the sweet little voice and bright little sayings quite won her hearer's heart.

"Ted, you know, he's such a good boy and he's selling papers, and I would just love to buy a paper of him—to drive down Tremont Street with you and buy a paper of him."

That remark served to recall Miss Joyce to herself. She had not dealt with Dick and Tony, and Will and Dan, and all the rest of them for nothing. Her naturally keen intui-

tions had been well sharpened. She had a dim perception of the condition of the child by her side. Lonnie was counting, probably, on a rise in her fortune; she might be calculating the chances of new clothes, and presents, and new and admiring friends, and she meant, if possible, to impress her glory on her former circle of acquaintances. Natural enough; but there was no use in unnecessarily disappointing her.

“Listen to me, Lonnie. You must not think you are coming to my house in Brookline to live. I shall only keep you a few days at the most. The Home will secure a place for you in the country, and you will have to learn to be obedient and to work. While you are with me I dare say Maggie, my housekeeper, will find something for you to do. I shall be glad, of course, if you have a pleasant time, but I don’t want you to make any mistake.”

Lonnie had not been making any mistake, but she was nothing if not sanguine, and she confidently expected, if she liked the house and appointments in Brookline, to stay there.

“Yes’m, I know. I never was brought up to work very much, nor to ’sociate with common children, and I don’t like coarse things, but,” catching a baffling expression on her companion’s face, “I’ll be glad to do all your work for you, and take care of your horse and all your other cattle, and do your washing and all, if I could do it to please you.”

Miss Joyce burst out laughing; then, to cover her amazement, said: “Would you like to know something about my establishment?”

“What’s that?”

“My home.”

“Oh, yes, I’d like to.”

“I often have boys with me, but very seldom any girls. I have two boys now, Will and Dan, only Will has gone to his mother, and perhaps will stay with her. And Dan is still out in the country, so you won’t see either of them. The first little boy I had was named John. He was a cripple and the dearest, loveliest little boy I ever saw; everybody thought so. We all loved him so much.”

"Where is he now?"

"He died. He had been run over by a wagon before I took him out to Brookline—that was what made him a cripple, and we knew he couldn't live very long."

"I wish you'd have a funeral while I'm at your house. I love funerals."

As Miss Joyce was absolutely unable to think of an answer the subject was passed over.

"What kind of a lady are you?"

"I? Oh, I am a working lady."

"A working lady!"

"Yes."

"Ted said if I asked you what kind of a lady you were you wouldn't know what I meant, and now I don't know what you mean. Are you a washlady?"

"No," trying not to laugh.

"I knew a saleslady once. Is that it?"

"No."

"What do you mean by a worklady?"

"I work—work hard; earn money if I'm lucky."

“Are you a cooker?”

“No, not even a steam cooker.”

“What makes you work?”

“I think everybody ought to.”

“Wouldn’t you have any money if you didn’t work?”

“Yes, I suppose so ; but not so much.”

“I don’t ever mean to be that kind of a lady. I’m just going to dances.”

“That would be pretty hard work, I think.”
Lonnie looked at her in undisguised amazement.

The house at Brookline was quite a revelation to Lonnie. She had never been inside a well-furnished house in her life, and the well-kept grounds and generous furnishings of the Gardiner residence filled her with admiration for one short moment.

“Now this is something like,” she thought. “I’m not going to let anybody see I’m not up to such things. Wouldn’t Ted and his mother, and Mrs. Cook, and all those Home children stare to see where I am ! I guess this suits me ; I’m just a-going to stay.”

While Miss Joyce was speaking to Maggie, Lonnie leaned luxuriously back in the best chair she could find, and smiled benevolently at Miss Joyce on her return. "This is all hunky! This suits me!"

"Come up-stairs and I'll show you where you are to sleep while you are here," and Miss Joyce led her past several bed-rooms whose magnificence concurred exactly with Lonnie's ideas, to a very plain, neat little room opening into Maggie's more elaborate apartment.

"Ain't there a sittin'-room goes with this room?" asked Lonnie, showing her disappointment. "I'm used to a sittin'-room along with my bed-room!"

"No, no sitting-room goes with it," unable to keep back a smile. "You will have to use the one down-stairs with me. When did you last have a bath?"

"Last night."

"Very well, then, you may wash your face and hands, and comb your hair; and as I don't enjoy looking steadily at brown checks,

you may lay off that apron and I will put a white apron on you. When I am in town you may wear your brown one."

"I'd like to go in town with you," sweetly.

"Oh, would you! I hardly think it practicable for me to avail myself of the pleasure of your company."

"Oh!" was the blank response.

Adorned in a dear little sheer-white apron, with tucks and embroidery, Lonnie was as pretty as a picture, and when she accidentally saw herself in a mirror she exclaimed in astonishment.

"You see God made you very pretty, Lonnie. I am sure he meant you to act well, too."

"Oh, yes; Mrs. Lakin said I'd make a first-rate actress, and I'd like it, too. Have you got any dimonts?"

"Not a diamond. Come in here and you may play on the piano if you want to."

That was the time Miss Joyce had touched the right spot. Real joy, unstained by any ulterior consideration or any nefarious schemes for the future, welled up in Lonnie's heart. She

sat quietly on the music stool, and with shining eyes softly touched the keys until supper-time. Sometimes she made sounds that seemed to her like a little tune, and then she would clap her hands.

The next morning, after breakfast, Miss Joyce told Lonnie that she was to put on her brown apron and do exactly what Maggie told her to do. That Maggie would find things for her to do to help her, and would take her with her to do the marketing, and give her her lunch.

“Now be sure you mind Maggie,” was her parting injunction.

“All right, I will,” sang out Lonnie. “I’ll be good! Shall I practice a little on the piano?”

“If you will be careful.”

“Yes; I’ll be careful!” Then she ran back in the house to Maggie. “Now, Maggie, which had you rather I’d do, put on that old hideous brown check apron and wipe dishes for you—mebby break ’em, you know—or keep on this pretty apron and go play you something perfect—ly love—ly on the piano?”

“I think you must put on the ‘hideous brown check apron,’ and come here and wipe the silver—you can’t break that—and save your white apron for Miss Joyce to see,” was the heartless rejoinder.

Maggie fully expected a fit of sulks. “These pretty children,” she thought, “never are worth a dime.”

“All right, Maggie, that’s the very ticket! and I’ll tell you all about Ted; and I could tell you things that would make your eyes stand right out of your head.”

Lonnie liked to work, and she enjoyed talking above all things; and she liked company, so she had a fine time. Everything went well until, after dinner, Maggie told her to go out and play. Lonnie didn’t know anything about playing in the real sense of the word, nor about playing alone, and she simply amused herself by sitting on the iron rod that served for a fence around the front lawn, and shouting “Hello!” or anything else she could think of, to every one that went by. When Maggie discovered



“WHAT WAS IT?” ASKED LONNIE
(Page 16)

what the brown-checked object was doing out front she was filled with indignation.

“Nice doings! I hope Miss Joyce won’t keep her here long! I’ll tell her to come play the piano.”

That invitation was effective to a degree, and Lonnie was as happy and good to look at on Miss Joyce’s return home as could be desired.

“How has Lonnie behaved, Maggie?” she asked.

“She’s the smartest little thing to talk ever I saw. But you just have to be all eyes and ears to know what she’s going to do next. She’s just all-pervadin’!”

Miss Joyce thought she would tell Lonnie some stories after supper. She thought she had new soil to work on and she was anxious, experimentally, to see what effect a regulation story with a moral at the end would have.

“Do you want to hear a story, Lonnie?”

“What do you mean?” smiled Lonnie.

“Why a story, a—”

"I mean is it ghosty and bloody and all, for I don't like that kind at night."

"No, it isn't."

"Well, I don't like any other kind."

"Perhaps you will like my kind," and she began a very interesting little tale indeed, for she was a particularly good story-teller and had had large experience with her boys. It was a story, however, with an object, and that object was to show the exceeding sinfulness of meddling. This object in time became very apparent. The rapt expression on Lonnie's face was replaced by an openly amused smile.

"Oh, come off!" she said in a tone so captivating as to palliate the impoliteness of the words themselves. "I'll just excuse the rest of that story. Now let me entertain you! How would you like to hear me play the piano?"

Miss Joyce laughed. Lonnie was lots of fun. "You can play for ten minutes, then you must go to bed."

Lonnie was so unfeignedly happy at the piano that Miss Joyce felt inspired to give her

a regular gala day before consigning her to farm life. So after Lonnie had gone to bed she said: "I'll let you drive with me in town to-morrow, and we will buy a paper of Ted, and we will have lunch at a nice place and go to some stores, and I will take you to a concert in Music Hall in the afternoon."

In one brilliant flash heaven was opened. Lonnie squealed with delight and long after Miss Joyce had departed she lay there in bed rehearsing all the glories of the coming day.

And it was a wonderful day, to be sure.

"I suppose the proper thing will be to stuff her with candy," thought Miss Joyce. "She doesn't look as though anything could make her sick."

So a box of caramels it was, and Lonnie ate them without criticism during the drive in town.

"There! there's Ted now!" she cried exultantly, pointing to the well-known figure. He did not seem to have changed much. His face wore the philosophic expression as of one who

could gaze unmoved on whatever life might unroll before him.

“Ted!” screamed Lonnie.

He looked up bewildered, and saw Lonnie seated beside the well-remembered lady of the five-cent piece.

“Well, Lonnie! you do beat everything for getting what you want,” he said slowly.

“How do you do, Ted?” said Miss Joyce. “Lonnie said she wanted to buy a paper.”

“Oh! I’ll give her one, if that’s all she’s after!” he said, handing out a paper. “A manilla bag would do her just as well, for all she could read on it.”

“You’ll sell me one, anyway, won’t you?”

“And, Ted, here’s this candy,” said Lonnie, handing over the box with over half the caramels in it. “They’re good—eat ’em!”

“Don’t you want ’em?”

“No, I rather you’d have ’em. How’s Bennie?”

“He’s all right, I guess. Somebody said he screamed when you left.”

“Ted,” said Miss Joyce, “if you can be here at this place at half-past twelve I want you to come and eat dinner with us at a restaurant.”

Ted’s face grew painfully red as he looked at his clothes.

“They are all right, dear. I am used to boys like you, I can assure you. You and I are going to be friends.”

He smiled shyly, and agreed to be there at the appointed time. Miss Joyce was sure from the look of the little fellow that he was not dressed warmly enough for the sharp weather they were having, and bought some heavy underwear for him, though she was careful not to say anything to Lonnie about it. Lonnie was wild over the stores they visited; she commented on everything, and watched every cent Miss Joyce spent, and followed with pleased eyes every yard of cloth or ribbon, every handkerchief and small article; and during the peregrination she managed to make a large collection of cards, colored papers, handkerchief ribbons, and other gimcracks.

They found Ted waiting at the place agreed upon, and a few words put him at his ease. He was evidently still greatly surprised at seeing Lonnie with Miss Joyce, but asking questions was not in his line. Lonnie, however, always longed to impart information, and in this case was especially anxious to display the present glory of her condition. She hoped Ted would tell of it, and that all Walnut Court would hear about her before night. At intervals, when she thought Miss Joyce was occupied with something else, she remarked to Ted ;

“You ought to see the house I live in—elegant! And the servants! And the place I sleep! Why, Ted, you never saw such doings! And the carriages! Oh, my! And gold-plated harness! I’m going to be a lady for all you said!”

“Are you really living there?” asked Ted, somewhat awed.

“Well, I should think I was! What’d you s’pose I’d be doing? And the eating! Everything all the time—all the gum, and pop, and ice-cream you can think of!”

“Oh, pshaw!” said Ted, laughing at the bantering look in Lonnie’s eyes; he did not believe it all by any means, but he could see enough with his own eyes to astonish him. Miss Joyce heard all that was said and she greatly desired to enlighten Ted as to the true state of affairs; but Lonnie was having such a delightful day she did not want to take cognizance of any delinquency unless she was obliged to. When they were through lunch and parting from Ted, she took him one side and gave him his bundle. “I want you to put on these warm clothes as soon as you go home, Ted. I don’t want you to be sick, and I want you to come out to my house to tea a week from to-night,” giving a card with her address. “Lonnie is only to be with me a few days, so you won’t see her, but you will have a nice time and you must be sure to come.”

Ted’s face showed signs of amusement at what she said about Lonnie, but he hastily resolved to suppress that item in his tale to Walnut Court. He would do as well by Lonnie as

he could in return for many and many a past favor.

The concert proved to be a great success as far as Lonnie was concerned, and she went to bed that night full of satisfaction and self-congratulation.

CHAPTER VII

A NICE LITTLE TAILOR

“MISS JOYCE, can you give me an old dress and some scissors, and a needle and thread?” asked Lonnie with an air of great importance.

“Well, what do you want to do now?”

“Why, I thought while you were in town, and after Maggie had got through with me, I would make Ted a nice suit of clothes. He’s always so ashamed of his clothes.”

“Do you think you could?” asked Miss Joyce, gravely.

“Oh, I’m sure of it! I saw just how Mrs. Cook sewed. She was an elegant sewer.”

“Do give it to her, Miss Joyce,” murmured Maggie, who was sweeping up the hearth; “maybe it will keep her off the front fence, hollerin’ at folks.”

So Miss Joyce, without throwing in any ad-

vice or restrictions, gave her an old dress skirt, the desired scissors, needle and thread.

"I'll jist give her a job of work first," thought Maggie, "or she'll be all through with that and ready to holler an hour before Miss Joyce gets back."

So she set Lonnie to polishing silver.

"How nice Maggie is," thought Lonnie. "I didn't know there were any such nice people."

"I'll help you as nice as can be, Maggie, and we'll have fun. I'll open the dcor for you. You have such pretty eyes."

"Mercy, child, how you do talk!"

"You never were bad, were you, Maggie? I'm awful bad sometimes. God doesn't like bad people. I haven't known much of anybody He did like until I knew you."

Maggie's theology would not have passed muster with any of the enlightened, but she felt that there must be something radically wrong with that statement.

"God sent His Son to save you, so He must love you."

“Oh, did he! Well, He’s sort of forgotten about it, then, for most folks don’t seem to think I’m a very good job. There, isn’t that shiny? Can’t I rub all your silver?”

“You may if you like,” for Maggie preferred the noble art of cooking to laying on silver polish.

Maggie produced more silver and was gratified by Lonnie’s outspoken admiration.

“Oh, what lots! Does Miss Joyce own all that?”

“Yes; it all belonged to her aunt, Miss Gardiner.”

“I didn’t know anybody had so much!”

By the time the silver was very creditably polished Lonnie’s thoughts reverted to her tailoring.

“Now, Maggie, don’t you think I better go on with Ted’s suit?”

“Yes, indeed. You go to work. You can bring it out here if you keep everything over there out of my way.”

“Goody, goody!” and Lonnie was soon cut-

ting briskly into the skirt. She laid it on the floor, kneeled down beside it, and, without any hesitation, cut out a pair of trousers about on the principle that one would use in cutting out those articles for a paper doll.

The legs were quite long and quite narrow, and the seat portion was a mere nothing. Maggie had moments of retiring hastily to the pantry and laughing in a silent way until the tears rolled down her cheeks.

Lonnie was mightily satisfied with the performance. Her mouth twisted first one way, and then the other, and her face was quite flushed with excitement.

“My! won’t Ted be pleased,” she thought; “such a nice black suit! He can wear them to the funeral if his mother does die—but she won’t.”

She punched her needle in and out with her thimbleless fingers, sewing sometimes over and over, and sometimes with a sort of a backstitch, and ever and anon with a goodly basting stitch to help herself along. By the time she had

sewed all the seams in some sort of a way, leaving little or no chance for any one to get inside of them, even supposing there had been room to accommodate anything but broom handles, it was near the hour for Miss Joyce's return.

"Come, Lonnie, you've worked enough," said Maggie; "go give yourself a nice bath, and fix yourself as clean as you can, and then you can play the piano. I'll hang these—these—trouser-loons"—with a mighty effort at repose—"up for you!"

Lonnie was sincerely obliged. Her patience was completely worn out. She had never stuck to anything so long before in her life, and she made a firm resolve that come what would she wouldn't make any more boys' suits.

When Miss Joyce came home she had some news for the very clean, and somewhat depressed little girl.

"We think it is all settled, Lonnie, about a place for you. Early next week I am going to drive you out to the Rowley farm, not a great

way out, and I believe you will be in a nice home. It is a real farm, with cows and horses and pigs and chickens, and everything."

"Any good sidewalks?"

"It's a farm, Lonnie."

"Well, is it like Walnut Court, or like here?"

"It isn't like either. There is a great deal more land around the house than there is here."

"Why, mercy me! there's land enough around this house!" and Lonnie's eyes flew open their widest.

"But this isn't country at all."

"It's country enough for me! I like other folks to live right up tight to the house I live in—not so lonesome like this."

"You'll see how it is when we get there," said Miss Joyce; "only I know you'll like it."

"Of course I'll like it," pleasantly; "but I'll be sorry not to see you and Maggie. When I grow up I mean to be as nice as Maggie. She knows a lot. She thought the pants I made Ted were splendid. I'm never going to make any

more, though. I would try them on, only I feel sure they'd bust out, and I wouldn't like to give him ripped open pants, would you?"

"No, I think I would give them to him the way they are."

"You asked him to come out here, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then I guess I better do 'em up nice for him, and leave them here, and you can give them to him."

"Very well, I will ; that is a good plan."

CHAPTER VIII

THE ROWLEYS

THE day came for Lonnie to go to the Rowleys. She was very much excited about it, especially as Miss Joyce had bought her a nice little valise, and it was filled with some scraps of new clothes. Maggie had baked her some cookies and had given her a five-cent brass watch as a token of her affection, and though Lonnie was very loth indeed to leave the piano, she felt much more regretful about leaving Maggie.

"Maggie has such a good character," she remarked fervently.

"You like Maggie better than you do me, don't you Lonnie?" laughed Miss Joyce.

"Why, now, Miss Joyce, I like meat and I like apples, and I don't know which I would like the best if I couldn't have but one."

"I'll forgive you, dear. Come now; all ready," and away they drove.

"I just would like to know what I'm going to get into next," thought Lonnie resignedly. "I know it can't be much worse than Mrs. Lankinses, anyway."

After a long drive they reached the place.

The low, rambling white house with its green blinds, and its leafless elms in front, and its four stiff little green pines along the front walk, pleased her very much. They drove up to a side door and were greeted in a hurried way by Mrs. Rowley.

"Is this the little girl? This her bag? All right. Come in and take a seat, won't you—no? I'm dreadful hurried with the baking, and the baby's cross as two sticks, teething. Well, thank you. I'll write the Board about the little girl—Lonnie, you say? She'll soon feel at home, I guess. The baby'll be company for her. Good-by. Come in, child, and bring your valise. I'm too busy to see to you right this minute, but take off your hat and wait."

They entered the warm, pleasant kitchen with its braided rugs, and a few plants in the south window, and the fragrant smell from the oven. Lonnie liked it and felt quite at home, as she did everywhere, but she sat stiffly on the edge of the old sofa until her eyes caught sight of the baby sitting like a cob in the corner, his round, blue eyes staring severely.

“Oh, my!” she exclaimed involuntarily.

“What’s the matter?”

“The baby—he—he looks as though his name was Bennie.”

“Well, it is Bennie! Didn’t some one tell you?”

“No’m. What’s all his name?”

“Benjamin Cook Rowley—named after his grandfather, Benjamin Cook.”

“How old is he?” asked the half-bewildered Lonnie.

“Year and a half, and uncommon backward for his age, I’m thinking. Never’s walked a step yet, and don’t try to talk more’n to ask for a drink or something to eat. But he’s a nice,

fat, good baby when his teeth don't trouble him, though that's pretty nigh all the time, seems like."

"Is that his picture?" for Lonnie's sharp eyes had singled out a small photograph tacked to the wall.

"No, but it looks enough like him. That's my brother's boy. His name's Benjamin Cook, too, after his grandfather. My brother lives in Boston. Their Bennie's two and over."

Lonnie perceived now how things were and hoped that Mrs. Cook would not find out her whereabouts. She could not for the life of her decide whether to make a great effort and do such wonderful things that Mrs. Cook would hear what a treasure was lost to her, or whether to "just raise hob" and be sent away where she would not be open to the aspersions and damaging reminiscences of Mrs. Cook.

"Do you often see that other Bennie?" she ventured.

"Land no! It's regularly unchristian. I ain't seen him for over a year. Mr. Rowley

drives up there and takes them a few things when he goes to the city and has time; but I don't get away and they don't."

That was good news, but not wholly reassuring.

Bennie's face had been wrinkling and he now emitted a terrific yell and bowed his tow head clear to the floor in grief. His mother hastily shut-to the oven door and ran to him.

"I can 'tention to him," said Lonnie involuntarily, and though Mrs. Rowley doubted it, as her baby was so timid, Lonnie, with her usual knack with children, proved eminently successful.

"Go ring the bell for dinner now, Lonnie," said Mrs. Rowley, flushed with hurrying the meal to the table.

"Where is it?"

"There's the rope—hangs down that elm tree there by the step. We have to call the hands to dinner."

"Well, I'm glad of that!" said the astonished Lonnie, and she rang the bell with great zeal.

Mr. Rowley came from the barn; a dark faced, shaggy bearded, squarely built man, with rather a gloomy expression.

"So," he said kindly, "is this the little girl? Welcome! Hope you'll feel at home," and in he went to souse his face and hands at the sink, hunt around blindly for the towel hanging where a towel always did hang, smooth out his hair, and to sit down at the head of the table. Mrs. Rowley showed Lonnie her place, tied the relics of a bib around Bennie, and then Lonnie noticed that there was another place vacant.

"Where's that boy?" said Mr. Rowley impatiently; "always late!"

At that moment the door opened and in came a boy of eleven or twelve, dark haired and dark eyed, squarely built like his father, with a wide mouth and square chin, and not a very pleasant expression. He slid into his chair without looking at anybody. His father evidently changed his mind about noticing his tardiness.

"This is the little girl, Frank. Her name is Lonnie. Can't you make her welcome?"

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Frank looked up with more of a scowl than a welcome on his face. Lonnie could not bear any stranger to seem to be averse to her, and she smiled with the most unmistakable good will at him. It seemed contagious, for a swift and very beautiful smile crossed the boy's face for an instant, and then he looked again at his plate. His father had noticed the smile and his own face became more cheerful.

"What did they have at school this morning, Frank?" he asked.

"Readin', cipherin', writin', spellin', jogaphy, physiology, grammar."

"Lonnie, you'll have to start in after Christmas. Don't seem worth while for you to begin until you learn the new ways here and get used to what Mrs. Rowley wants you to help her about. Quit that monkey shinin', Bennie. You'll have the whole cover off. He's a right smart baby, now isn't he, Lonnie?"

"Oh, he's beautiful!" was the prompt answer, and Mr. Rowley wished from the bottom of his



heart that either one of his children had such a pleasant, outspoken disposition.

After dinner Mrs. Rowley tried to have Lonnie take hold and do a few things, but Lonnie, still undecided as to her course, was remaining neutral.

“Did you ever wash dishes, Lonnie?”

“I don’t know how—very well.”

“That’s queer; but then you’re little. Here, take the plate this way. My, but you’re awkward! How come you to be so awkward? A boy could do better than that. Can you dust?”

“No’m; I don’t know how.”

“Well, any one with ordinary gumption can dust. I thought they showed ’em that first thing at that Home. Must be a shiftless concern! Now go and dust careful in the settin’-room—rub everything.” And a little later on examining her work:

“Well, I never! What a dawdlin’ piece you are. What have you dusted? Here, let me show you. There—now let me see you do it. Well, I never! Why, you’re not worth show-



ing. You might as well know, first as last, that I'm too busy already to make you work. I can tell you, when it's necessary, but that's all I can do. If you're too stupid to profit by it I can't put up with you. I'll have to hustle you back and get somebody else."

Lonnie felt chagrined to have raised such an opinion of herself just by her fooling, so she said: "Well, I expect I can learn, if I try hard; and I'm first rate to amuse a baby."

Then she took the duster and showed decided signs of future ability, and pacified poor Mrs. Rowley.

At night she slept in a little closet-like room that opened into "the bed-room," and just across the hall was the little room Frank used. Both the children were in bed, and Bennie was asleep in his crib, when a visitor came to the kitchen door. Lonnie, wide awake, heard all that passed.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Rowley," said the visitor, who proved to be a young man, the school teacher, "but your boy was not in school this



morning, and as you asked me to let you know, I thought I'd stop as I was passing. I'm sorry, and if there's anything I can do about it I will."

"Obliged to you, Mr. Long, but I'll see what a good flogging will do. Take a seat. No? Good-night. Nice moonlight," and the door was shut.

"Now, father, what are you going to do?" asked Mrs. Rowley, anxiously.

"I'm going to give him one good flogging," was the answer in a trembling voice.

"Not now. Why, the boy's asleep."

"Yes, now, asleep or not asleep."

"Can't you wait until to-morrow?"

"No; I won't do it if I wait. And I've come near enough ruining him now. This whole fall he's been doing this thing, and just as good as lying about it every time. And father and son, we've been honest since this here township was settled."

"Oh, don't hurt him!"

"You ought not to mind if I do, Letty. You've been as kind and good to him as any-



body could be, and he's never given you a pleasant word nor look. It just makes me rage."

"Well, he'll get over it; boys never do like a step-mother."

"He's had three years in which to get over it. I'm too ashamed of him to hold my head up."

He nervously ran the strap through his fingers and then went to the boy's room.

"Frank! get up, I say!"

"What do you want?" sleepily.

"Wake up and I'll tell you."

"I am awake."

"Mr. Long was here and said you weren't in school to-day. I've promised you a flogging for that sort of thing long enough, and now I'll give it to you. If you're going to disgrace the good old Rowley name you sha'n't be able to say I didn't try to stop you. Now, stand out there!"

One, two, three, four, five—six times fell the strap, but almost no sound escaped either father or son.



“Now, get into bed. And for pity’s sake, Frank, don’t make me do this again.”

Mr. Rowley walked away with rather uneven step, took his hat and slammed the outside door as he went out to the stable to hide his misery with his horses. Mrs. Rowley had taken a lamp and gone to the buttery to be out of sight and hearing.

Lonnie listened anxiously; not a sound. She never minded much being hurt herself, but she never could stand anything else being hurt. Presently she heard a stifled sob. She rose hastily and went to Frank’s room.

“Oh, Frank, don’t! don’t feel bad! Where’d it hurt you? I’ll help you, Frank!”

“What’s the matter with you?”

“Oh! I didn’t want you to be whipped! He’s a wicked man, and I hate him!”

“Take that back! He is not wicked!”

“Oh! he’s good then; but don’t feel bad! Does it hurt very much? I’ve been whipped lots and lots of times, and pounded, too.”

“He didn’t whip very hard.”



"I didn't think he did, either. Oh, Frank! don't cry; please don't!" And she rubbed her warm little face up against his tear-stained cheeks, and hugged him and patted his head.

"I wouldn't go to school, either; so there! Horrid place!"

It seemed as though Frank was naturally contrary. He had been thinking that he hated school, and wouldn't go now, no matter what, and that his father was wicked and cruel to whip him, and that he would run away to sea and be a sailor and a pirate, and never, never, never see his father nor his step-mother again. Now, as soon as Lonnie suggested just what he had been thinking, he couldn't help opposing it.

"I'd ought to go to school. I won't know anything if I don't."

"Well, I'd run away from home. I wouldn't stay where I had such horrid folks."

"Why, I got good folks!"

"I thought you didn't like 'em."

And then it seemed to Frank as though he not only liked them, but loved them very much.



“Don’t you feel bad, Frank. I love you, and I think you’re a nice boy, and I’ll go get you pie, or anything you want to eat.”

“I’d like a drink.”

“All right, I’ll get a drink,” and unerring as if she had a lamp, she brought a cup of water.

“There, is that better? Want any water on your hurt places?”

“I don’t hurt any.”

“It wasn’t much of a strapping, I guess. Mrs. Lakin could show him a thing or two! Well, I’ll go back to bed if you don’t want anything. Don’t you feel bad any more.”

Later, Mr. Rowley came in, haunted by visions of a heart-broken boy, and before going to bed he tiptoed softly with shaded lamp to Frank’s room. The boy was lying there, sleeping quietly, all traces of tears and sobs gone. His father felt relieved, but muttered to himself, “Never thought twice about it, most likely—I knew I was too easy!”



## CHAPTER IX

### FRANK

FRANK's belief in his father's goodness and methods did not last him until the next morning. Then the shame of going to the breakfast table, of facing his father and mother, whom he regarded as partner in, if not instigator, of his misfortune, of going to school with Mr. Long suspecting that he had been whipped into it, rankled within him. His father tried with rough awkwardness to put his hand on his shoulder, but Frank twisted away, although the slight caress had nearly cost him a burst of tears. Lonnie squeezed his hand and looked her sympathy with better success. He sat sullenly through breakfast, and then without a word to anybody, took his books and started for school.

“ Well, father, he's going to school anyway ;



don't you be so down-hearted. Everything will turn out for the best," said Mrs. Rowley.

"You mean well, Letty," murmured her husband, "but I feel like I never did the right thing by him once since he was born; and I can't hold up against it."

Lonnie had been rather an awed listener. So grown folks had feelings, too, and were like other folks. Lonnie had never been really interested before in anybody's feelings. Now she was listening to and watching these people with the greatest concern, and without the slightest reference to herself; all this had nothing to do with herself and seemed to be very absorbing in spite of that fact.

Lonnie was on the lookout for Frank all the morning, and as she happened to be sent to the barn for eggs just as he appeared in sight, she ran to meet him.

"C'm'on get eggs with me! What you feeling bad about?"

"I'm mad. I'm mad as a hornet. I didn't like the way that old Long looked at me. I



know he thought I'd been whipped and came to school because I was afraid of another, and I wasn't, neither."

"You ought to fight him!"

"I'm just not going to stay here any more. My father don't like me, nor my step-mother, and I'm going."

"When?"

Frank had not planned that far, but he made a dash at it and said: "This very day. I'm not going to sleep in that bed and be whipped again."

"Where you going?"

"Oh, up to Boston," vaguely.

"Where you going to stay?"

"I don't know; somewheres."

Lonnie shook her head. Some things she did know.

"That ain't easy—if you don't know a place to go to. If it came night lots of poor people would do for you if you really didn't have no home, but they'd say, 'Who are you and where'd you come from?' and when they found



you had a nice home in the country they'd say, 'Go 'long; don't come sponging on us. There's plenty without homes for us to help out; go back to your home and behave yourself.' That's what everybody says, first lick—behave, behave, behave. Makes me tired! What would you do for money?"

"Sell papers, maybe."

"But you haven't a license."

Frank had never heard of a license.

"Black shoes."

"But you haven't any kit, and you couldn't make much of anything anyway. It's freezing cold these nights."

"I'd go in a store."

"All the boys wants to go in a store. And they say, 'Bring your what you call it,' and 'Who's your folks?' and all such sassy things."

"I'll go to sea."

"Well, then you would wish you were out of it! Why, just standing on the Charles bridge cuts the bones right out of you; and they kick you right and left. Why, that strapping wasn't



nothing to what Lucy Day told all us girls her brother went through with."

"Well, what will I do, then?"

"I'll tell you what I'd do if I was bent to do something. I'd just scare my father to fits, so that he wouldn't touch that strap never again, nor never say school again long as I lived."

"How?"

"You go to school this afternoon all right, books and all, and when you come back don't let a mortal soul see you, and get up here in the barn in that up-stairs place where the hay is, and hide good in the hay. That's warm enough; and I'll come out and bring you the greatest lot of things to eat—everything there is; and you can just stay there until your father is scared enough, and then you can come back and it will be all right."

Frank did not think much of the plan as a whole, but he reflected that it might do as a starter, and that in the morning he could go when and where he chose without Lonnie's knowing anything about it.



Lonnie went in with the eggs; dinner was ready and eaten in uncomfortable silence, except by Bennie, who could not understand the unusual quiet, and so made equally uncomfortable noises. Mr. Rowley tried desperately to say something kind to Frank, but his only remark was received so sulkily that he gave it up in despair.

Frank took his books and started for school again, giving one wistful glance at his father as he passed him. His father noticed it, but he was not a man quick to act, and he had not thought of anything to do about it until Frank was already at school.

He waited around the house for him to come home from school, but there was no Frank. Lonnie, in the course of the afternoon, had managed to embezzle enough provisions for a small army, and to secrete them in the barn. She went up to the loft carrying her plunder, and found Frank very comfortably ensconced in a little hay cave, but already tired of the situation. He felt as though he had been away from home for months.



"It's real good of you, Lonnie, to bring me such a lot to eat. I'm about starved! What do they say about my not coming, at the house?"

"Why, nothing! Haven't noticed it, I guess."

Frank was disappointed; he felt as though they all ought to be sitting weeping, though why he could not have told.

When supper-time came and no Frank his father looked worried.

"Oh, he has just stopped at one of the neighbors," said Mrs. Rowley, consolingly. "He felt out of sorts, and he will probably stay away as long as he dares."

But Mr. Rowley was not to be satisfied. He looked up anxiously at every sound, and after supper he wandered around the house and down the road, and finally began calling him over and over again in a hopeless way.

"You ought not to worry, father," begged Mrs. Rowley. "He is just acting the way all boys act by spells. He has stayed at Bob's or



Harry's, or is just hiding around. He will come in before you go to bed."

"It doesn't seem like him," hesitated the father.

Lonnie was sent to bed resolved not to go to sleep, but she did. Mrs. Rowley went to bed at the usual time and fell into a sound slumber, also as usual.

Lonnie was a light sleeper, and later on in the night she was aroused. She heard a low groan, then another. That was a different sound from anything she had ever heard in her life. Her heart beat uncomfortably and the vertebræ of her back-bone seemed to be shoving against each other; she crept softly out of bed and looked through the door. The lamp stood on the table; beside it sat Frank's father, his head buried in his hands. He made another low moan, scarcely audible. Lonnie was thrilled through and through. That was too awful. She couldn't stand it to see anything suffer that way. She would go get Frank that minute. Putting on her shoes and



wrapping one of her quilts about her, she very quietly slipped out through the shed door and sped along in the brilliant moonlight toward the barn. The trees, the fences, all the small buildings, the grindstone and saw-buck and wood pile, and all the common, every-day things stood out with startling distinctness, yet with an unfamiliar air. Lonnie had never known fear in her life and she entered the gloomy barn without a tremor. The rustling and breathing of the cattle sounded strangely; she climbed the loft ladder, then called:

“Frank!”

No answer.

“Frank!”

“What?” called a sleepy, half-frightened voice.

“Oh, Frank, come over here to me. I’m by the ladder.”

“What you doing up here, Lonnie?” and Frank came groping toward her, until he had grown accustomed to the dim moonlight as it sifted through the small openings in the gables.



“Oh, Frank, your father feels so bad! I heard him groan frightful; it woke me up and I looked, and I most cried, he feels so bad; and I know he’s crying—and he felt so bad at supper. Please come, Frank; come and make him feel better. Nothing will do but that! Come, now, I’ll take you! I’ll fix it all right. I’ll tell him it was my fault. Don’t be afraid.”

“Who’s afraid?” was the gruff reply. “I’m coming, if you’ll only go along.”

So down they went and Frank’s heart thumped wildly; his father feeling badly—for him! Now that it was so—that his father did mind—it was no joke at all. It was too awful. Hand-in-hand they ran to the house. Lonnie led the way through the shed, and as they stood in the kitchen door, the lamplight shining full on them, the haggard faced man heard the noise and slowly turned.

“Oh, Frank!” he murmured, half rising; but Frank had made one bound toward him, and with a wild sob of “father!” was close in his arms.



“Oh, father, I’m so sorry,” said he brokenly. “You oughtn’t to forgive me, but I know you will. And I ought to have had ten dozen whippings instead of just one, and I wish you’d give me one now—this minute. I’ll get you the strap.”

“Sh! Don’t, Frank, I never can again, no matter what happens. I thought it was my duty, but I had rather never do my duty again. Oh, Frank, you’ll never go away from me—that way. I don’t believe I could live through it.”

Then Frank had to cry some more at that, and vow his father was the best in the world.

“But how did you come back just then, Frank?” asked his father finally, the question occurring to him for the first time.

“Lonnie went and brought me. She knew I was in the barn, and she knew you felt bad, and she came and made me come in to tell you I was sorry.”

“It was Lonnie?” in an astonished voice.

“Yes, Lonnie.”

“Lonnie, child, where are you?”



“Here,” from near the stove.

“Come over here, Lonnie, I want to see you; keep that quilt around you, for it isn’t very warm here.”

Lonnie sidled slowly toward him.

“Here,” and he lifted her on to one knee, while Frank occupied the other. “I want to talk to you, too. You’ve lifted a three-years’ load of sorrow from my heart this night. You’ve done for me what fortune, nor health, nor anything I’ll ever have could do for me. I’m a Rowley myself, and I never forget what’s been done for me—never. I’m your friend; your good friend for your life, no matter what may come to you.”

Lonnie was staring with all her eyes. Nothing ever had moved her like this night’s doings, and now seemed to come the climax, for Mr. Rowley’s deep voice was very grave and kind and serious—what could he say next?

“This very day,” he went on, never taking his eyes from her’s and holding her’s irresistibly, “I had a letter from my wife’s brother in Bos-



ton—from Benjamin Cook, of Walnut-Court. He said that Mrs. Cook had been to the Home to inquire about you, and that she learned you were to come here. She didn't want anything written here about you, but Ben was angry and he wrote. He wrote what you did at their house. Now, the Rowleys hate stealing and dishonesty and meanness and trickery as much as they do murder. There's nothing could have been told me about anybody that would turn me quicker against them than that. But I say to you," slowly and solemnly, "I'm your friend. I'm going to stick by you, whatever you do. If you do—such things—right here in my house, you're going to be forgiven and helped. You never need to feel afraid of me. Maybe that was chance. Maybe that wasn't your real nature. But if it was, if you're ever so tempted again, you come to me on the minute and I'll help you. And this is your home—your real, true home—your own home, and I want you to make it so, and claim it, and be a daughter, a loving daughter, to my wife. Now, dear, I know



you won't forget this ; and you slip to bed and warm up before you catch the pneumonia."

And Lonnie, with honestly quivering lips, and real honest heart-moved tears, silently did as she was bid.

Frank's arms went tightly around his father's neck and his lips close to his father's ear : " Say, father, I won't run away from school any more " —long pause. " And say, father, I'm going to be decent to mother. She's been awful good to me."

" Oh, Frank, you'll bring peace and comfort into this house if you'll only stick to that," was the quick answer. " I've prayed the good Lord for that until my heart's just failed me."

" Oh, I'm the meanest —!" groaned Frank.

" No, you're a good boy. I always said so," was the prompt reply. Then his father went with him to his little room and staid beside him until he was in bed, and then could not make up his mind to leave him until the tired boy had fallen asleep.

But even after Mr. Rowley himself had fallen



into a sound slumber poor Lonnie was crying to herself.

Now she had a home and one that she knew she wanted. She had a friend and one that she suddenly had become aware she cared for. She was not going to be disgraced by anything the Cooks could say, and she meant to try to please Mrs. Rowley.

“I’m just going to be the very best little girl in this world,” she virtuously resolved ; but it was at least an hour before she could go to sleep.



## CHAPTER X

### A RED-LETTER DAY

MRS. ROWLEY gave a scream of terror.

“Lonnie, quick! Call somebody, quick! quick!”

Lonnie gave a spring for the door, leaving the coffee-pot in a most precarious position, and jerked the bell-rope in the elm tree with startling energy. Mr. Rowley and Frank were both at the barn waiting for breakfast, and she hoped that would bring them in a hurry. Back she went to the kitchen. Mrs. Rowley was still wringing her hands in despair before Bennie, who was black in the face from choking.

Wondering why the terrified woman had not done anything Lonnie rolled Bennie over, slapped him, shook him, and tried in vain to hold the heavy child up by his heels.



"He's swallyd it, anyway," she remarked, breathless with her exertions, as the child's eyes ceased rolling, his face became a more natural color, and his breathing began again.

In rushed Mr. Rowley—"What is the matter?" and Frank crying, "Oh, what is it?"

"He's swallowed it! He's swallowed it!" wailed Mrs. Rowley. "He'll die! Oh, my! Oh, my!"

"Swallowed what?" and Mr. Rowley picked the exhausted child up and began to feel of him.

"It was a safety-pin and it was wide open! Oh, oh!"

"Frank, you ride for the doctor anyway, quick as you can!"

"Oh, he'll die before the doctor comes! If it hadn't been for Lonnie he'd be dead now!" and Mrs. Rowley, wholly unnerved, began to cry hysterically.

"I know what to do," said Lonnie, eagerly. "I know just what a doctor said to do. You mash up them potatoes just as quick's ever you



can," pointing to the dish of potatoes boiled with their jackets on, smoking on the stove. "Skin 'em and mash 'em, quick!" and she proceeded to do it herself, while Mrs. Rowley helplessly tried to follow suit.

"What's that for, Lonnie?" asked Mr. Rowley, feeling as though Lonnie was their only hope until the doctor could be brought.

"You chirk Bennie up so he'll want to eat. We can't make him if he won't. There was a little girl lived next to us once, and she done that very identical thing—swallyd an open safety-pin. And my, but there was a howdy-do! And a doctor was right in the next room with Mis' Jenks' rheumatics, and he says, 'Feed her mashed potatoes jes' as long as she'll take 'em,' and she was mighty hearty, and we all fed 'em to her. My, you'd thought she'd busted! And she was all right, and the pin didn't hurt her a bit."

"Why not?" inquired Mrs. Rowley, interested out of her tears.

"Oh, I don't know everything," impatiently,



“but the potato wrapped itself all around the pin, and kept it from jagging her insides. Here Bennie—um-um—good; cream and salt and butter on it! My, how good it looks.” Bennie opened his cunning little mouth and took a little like a bird. The taste suited him exactly and he straightened up for more, Mr. Rowley unconsciously working his own mouth in unison, so anxious was he lest Bennie’s appetite should fail him. But Bennie seemed to be built hearty, like the other safety-pin child, for he was still eating, though in a satiated manner, when the doctor came.

“Well, he isn’t going to die this minute for certain,” laughed the doctor, taking in at a glance the anxious group—Mr. Rowley still holding Bennie, Mrs. Rowley sitting close by whipping up the potato with a fork, and Lonnie on her knees before Bennie, coaxing down the soft, creamy looking puffs of potato; and Bennie, red-cheeked and fat, lazily absorbing the same.

Frank’s face looked natural for the first time since he had started for the doctor. He had



been overwhelmed by the idea that Bennie was going to die as a judgment on him for his contumacy.

“Lonnie said to feed him potato,” said the anxious father, still scarcely daring to take his eyes from his youngest.

“Well, well! Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—judging from the size of her! Lonnie, you’ll have to be a doctor yourself when you are grown, you have so much good horse sense. That’s what we need—horse sense. Rowley, you just ought to keep that child around if she has a head on her shoulders. For of all the scatter-brained families when anything happens, this one beats the whole township. Fact! Looks to me, Mrs. Joe, as if that child would mightily profit by a sleep. He’ll drop right off if you lay him down. And as I was hurried off here for nothing, without any breakfast, I’ll just sit and take a bite with you; though I must say your breakfast has got past its prime by an hour or more.”



“Oh, I’ll have you a good breakfast in no time!” said Mrs. Rowley energetically, miraculously regaining her spirits now that the tower of strength in time of trouble, the doctor, had appeared on the scene. “I’ll lay him in his crib and we’ll eat soon. Take a seat, doctor; take a seat!”

“Yes, do,” added Mr. Rowley, wondering how he had forgotten that item, handing Bennie over to his wife, and trying to straighten out his stiffened back.

Mrs. Rowley covered the baby’s face with kisses, and began preparations for a new meal.

Lonnie, highly elated by all that had happened, and especially by the doctor’s remarks, skipped around in her liveliest fashion, and fairly paralyzed Mrs. Rowley by her deftness. That this child was the same as the awkward little creature of yesterday was difficult to believe. “It does beat all, Lonnie, how smart you are! I never dreamt it, seeing you yesterday.”

Lonnie realized then that she had forgotten the *rôle* she had assumed, and that now she had



shown she really could do things. On the whole she was glad of it; she liked to work if she had company, and she did dearly love to astonish people and be praised.

After they had all taken their places at the breakfast table and the doctor was enjoying his bacon and eggs and coffee, Mrs. Rowley went to take a look at Bennie. While she was gazing with adoring affection at the fat little chunk in the crib, Frank said shyly by her side: "I'm awful glad he's all right, mother."

"Oh, Frank!" exclaimed the startled woman; and realizing all that those few words would mean to her and to Bennie, and to her husband and all of them, she sat down in the nearest chair and buried her face in her floury apron.

"I'm going to try getting along without making you so much trouble," said Frank awkwardly, his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Oh, Frank!" was all the poor woman could say, and that was all that ever was said; but the wet blanket seemed to be suddenly lifted from all their troubled family relations.



Life looked so pleasant to Mrs. Rowley that day that she felt in a mood to celebrate.

“I just declare, Lonnie,” she remarked as they did up the dinner dishes together, “we’ve just never had any sort of entertainin’ since I married Mr. Rowley. We didn’t seem to think of it the first year, and then Bennie comin’ along, and being right cantankerous, and—well, we didn’t seem to feel to be very entertainin’ people. And now I’d like to have in all the folks, and set table for fifteen or twenty, and have things! Nobody’s better able than we. Mr. Rowley’s just as forehanded and thrivin’, and not a speck close. He don’t know what close means. Now, I’d like to have in the doctor and the minister, and Deacon Brewster and Deacon Hart, and the teacher and the Riders, and my Brother Ben, from Boston, and more I’ll think of. I just would!”

“Oh, do!” said Lonnie, fervently. “I jes’ love company!”

“To be sure; and if you was to set out you’d be a right smart help to me, too. I just set the



greatest store by baking and cooking and all, and there ain't a better for miles around here—and you could have a finger in it all."

"Oh! when would you have it—to-morrow?"

"Hear the child! City folk just don't know the first thing about getting a real lay-out! Why, I'd want weeks, I declare, to have all the plum puddin's and pound cake and fruit cake, and all the things I'd have. I'd be lavish!"

"Oh, do!"

"Now, I'd love to have it Thanksgivin', and here it is right on us. Come all unawares! And the next thing's Christmas. We wouldn't be a speck hurried gettin' ready for Christmas. Since I been here we just haven't had nothing at all for Christmas, like anything. And Mr. Rowley he tells how they used to do—his folks. You see his folks kept Christmas. Lots didn't in New England. Mine didn't, way back—thought it was Popish, most like. But the Rowleys were English, and they just stuck to it through thick and thin to do great things Christmas."



“Oh, do!”

“He knows a lot, Mr. Rowley does, about how to do; and this house, you know, is sort of built around the old house to begin with, and this room and the settin’-room was all one, and that fire-place in there is just a little one fixed in over the great big one of old days; and I think it would be an easy matter to have that taken right out, and have the big one, and have a log and all, same as used to be. Maybe not. But I think Joe would like it. I do. And if ever a man deserved to have things the way he liked, once in a while, it’s Joe Rowley. It certainly is!”

“Let’s have it! I’ll help.”

“We’ll just do it! And Mr. Rowley can see he married a woman that could cook, if she’s no mortal good at anything else.”

“Who said you weren’t?” and there stood Mr. Rowley in the doorway, smiling his broadest. “I’ve been so rooted to the spot hearing about that dinner I could neither budge nor speak. Let’s have it. Let’s have it all! We’ve been mightily



prospered, and let's have a regular old Christmas set-to; and have some one, or more, to help you, Letty; I never feel's though you were over and above strong."

"Yes, I'm strong if I've a light heart. And Lonnie bids fair to be a wonderful help with the baby. There's nothing like having somebody pleasant around a baby, so I can get a bit of peace and do things without feeling so hurried. I think women would feel more heart about their babies—pleasure in 'em, I mean—if it wasn't such terrible wrestlin' work to fetch 'em along day and night till they get to be two or three years old."

"Oh, I'll care for Bennie lovely while you cook those elegant things, Mrs. Rowley!"

"It worries me, child, to hear you Mrs. Rowleyin' me. Call me Aunt Letty and him Uncle Joe—it sounds more human-like."

"That's right; do!" beamed Mr. Rowley.

Lonnie was always well suited to be in the thick of things wherever she was, and the uncle and aunt business exactly suited her.



That was having folks. She wished Ted could hear that—and hear about that feast.

“Yah!” gurgled Bennie. He had been sitting on the floor sucking a spoon. Everybody looked at him, and, as though impressed by the solemnity of the occasion and by his own position as the observed of all observers, he laboriously took hold of a chair near him, pulled himself up beside it, smiled benevolently in turn at each electrified person, and then, with a chuckle, waving his fat arms, he staggered unevenly a few steps toward his father.

“Bless my soul!” ejaculated Mr. Rowley as he caught him. “I thought that child never would walk!”

Mrs. Rowley ran to embrace the small hero, and Lonnie, glorying in this further excitement, tore frantically from the house, shouting, “Frank! Bennie’s walked! Frank! Frank! Bennie walked all alone!”

So Frank came in and they tried to have Bennie do it again, but he simply squatted on the floor and made himself as heavy as possible,



though looking with conscious pride at all his relations.

“If I had a bit of red silk, and a good keepin’ calendar,” said Mrs. Rowley, “I’d just sew it through this day. Seems like I never was so light-hearted!”



## CHAPTER XI

### A DAY'S OUTING

"Now, Frank, this is what I call a day to my mind! Frosty and clear, and sunny and sharp, and mellow, everything a day should be; suits me!" And Mr. Rowley clicked contentedly to his horses without expecting them to take the slightest notice of it. He was taking a load of windfalls to the city.

The Rowley homestead, with its outlying orchards, its good, tight farm buildings, well kept corn and wheat fields, and the mowing and all, was in plain sight behind them from the top of the hill they were now on.

"Pete and Bill look good, don't they?" continued Mr. Rowley. "I like to see a sleek, comfortable horse."

"Rider says you stuff 'em with too much hay—that they're awful lazy."



"Rider, indeed! Jake Rider will have to jump in his socks this good while yet before he can show cattle and horses like Joe Rowley!"

"Bob Rider said his father could beat you any day drivin' a bargain."

"And what'd you say?"

"Nothin'. I just hit him," simply.

"An' him fourteen, if he's a day!" Mr. Rowley laughed and slapped his son on the back. "Now, Frank," more seriously, "Bob Rider only just about told the truth. Father nor son, no Rowley ever sought to take advantage drivin' a sharp bargain. Nobody ever drove a sharp bargain against us—that was never said—but a Rowley never boasted nor tried to drive a close bargain against others. Fair and honest and square, with neighbor or friend or enemy, if the Rowleys ever had a motto—and it's said they did way back in England—that ought to have been it. There was just one of us, so far's ever I heard tell, that was at all out of the way, and that's John Rowley, my brother, and he's been this fifteen year



out West, with nobody hearing from him. There wasn't nothin' bad about John Rowley neither, just restless and rovin'. There, now, this is our last sight of our place, just nine miles from the city. Pretty sight now, ain't it, Frank?"

"Course it is. Wind's cold up here."

"Comin' up, sure's I live. It will be a nipper going home if it isn't at our backs. But we have been having it mild for second week in December. I declare, if I didn't know better I'd say the apples under this seat kept kicking my feet.

Frank burst into a laugh, which he vainly tried to stifle.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Oh, nothin' much!"

"Well, seems to hit you just right. Glad to see you laugh. We Rowleys never seem to be merry-hearted like we ought. That Lonnie, now—she's light-hearted as a bird, whether she ought to be or not. She just makes my hair stand on end with her rattlin' tongue and her



sass and her songs. Confound those apples, how they do act!" Seized by a sudden impulse, he leaned over and looked under the seat, then over the seat; gave a poke at a gunny sack, and was met by an enraged, "Quit poking me!" The sack began a convulsive wriggling, and out popped Lonnie's head, her blue yarn hood very much awry, and her cheeks as red as the apples. "I swan!"

Frank was just shouting with laughter.

"Lonnie, now," reproachfully, "what are you doing here?"

"Well, Uncle Joe, I wanted to go to town, and I just knew if I asked you, you'd say, 'Ask Aunt Letty, child,'" imitating his voice so that he smiled in spite of himself, "and she'd say, 'Now, father, I think she'd best stay here and company Bennie, and not go traipsing off to the city 'long o' you men folks.'" The smile on Mr. Rowley's face changed to a broad grin, while Frank doubled himself all over with fun. "And you'd say," pointing an indignant finger at him, "'you stay home this time, like a good girl,



Lonnie, and next time Uncle Joe'll take you.'"

Her last imitation was of Mr. Rowley's most helplessly cajoling accents, and Frank seemed on the verge of a convulsion.

"What'd you want to come for, Lonnie?"

"Honest now, Uncle Joe, I'll tell you. I've saved up fifteen cents, and I heard you were going to Mrs. Cook's to take her a few apples, and I thought I'd like to take her that fifteen cents I charged up at the meat shop and spent making her Bennie sick."

"Well, now, who'd a thought!"

"You see," confidentially, "I could have waited till you'd be ready to take me, like you'd have said if I had asked to go, but I was afraid you wouldn't go there again before Christmas; and they're all coming out Christmas, and I'd be afraid every minute, with so many people there, Mr. Cook would begin and tell all he knew about me and my doings, and I thought if I could only just give him his fifteen cents before Christmas maybe he'd be satisfied not



to be so smart. He's a terrible hard man, I think."

"That's long-headed, for sure; but you don't feel about it the way I would, certain. However, you're small, very."

"I can walk back easy enough now," said Lonnie, knowing she wouldn't have to.

"Oh, I guess you might as well go along, now you've got this far. Don't you go to any monkey-shinin', will you?"

"No, having a ride to town and going to Walnut Court in my new hood's monkey-shinin' enough for me for one day. I hope I'll see Ted!"

"Frank," said his father suspiciously, "did you know Lonnie was along?"

"Course. I tucked her in. I knew she wouldn't get to go any other way, and Lonnie gets terrible tired doing house work right along."

"Do you, Lonnie?"

"You try it yourself and see."

"I thought girls and women folks was made that way."



“I wasn’t made right way, then.”

“You see, father, Lonnie’s mighty aggravatin’ to mother about the work lots of times, pretty near drives her crazy. I don’t see how she stands it; but when it comes to tendin’ Bennie Lonnie never flickers, and mother’s so afraid he’ll breathe a little air she keeps him right at the house, and Lonnie, too. Why, Bennie’s gettin’ real pale to what he was since it turned cold. You’d just ought to persuade mother to let Bennie be out, and then Lonnie’d have a real good time, even if she did have to lug Bennie around, and mother’d like it, too, once she saw Bennie lived through it.”

“It might make him sick.”

“Oh, pshaw, father! I’ve just asked lots of people, because I wanted to know, and everybody says mother’ll make Bennie sick, because she’s so easy scared about him.”

“We’ll see—we’ll see about it.”

As they drew near the city Lonnie became greatly excited. The country was all well enough, but for her part give her the city.



She wanted to see people, all sorts of people, whether she knew who they were or not. She wanted to hear city noises. Cocks and chickens, and cows and horses and sheep—their noises were interesting enough as long as you didn't know what they were, but day after day they grew excessively tiresome. And no police, and no patrol, and no ambulance—no anything worth mentioning. She was quite afire with love of the city.

The very dogs in the street looked more interesting to her than the country dogs. The sights and sounds in the market while Mr. Rowley disposed of his apples filled her with joy. She drank it in. And she was so hilariously entertaining that Frank stayed near her to get the benefit of it.

“Now, you youngsters, all aboard for Walnut Court!”

Just before they reached Cambridge Street Lonnie suddenly grew quite pale and shrank close to Mr. Rowley. “Oh, Uncle Joe,” she half whispered, “do you suppose Mrs. Lakin's



back in Walnut Court—will she see me? Could she make me stay?”

“Sure enough, I wonder if she is back and would make any trouble! She nor anybody couldn’t get you while I’m around. Wouldn’t you like to be with her again?”

She had not thought of it before—except perhaps to remember this or that amusing episode dating from Mrs. Lakin’s time; but now with a vividness that made her feel faint she realized the Lakin life on one hand, a sort of pariah existence, the very pleasures of a more or less forbidden character, the daily, hourly insincerity, the subterfuges, the opposition and dislike of all decent neighbors, the roughness and carousing and untidiness, the hand-to-mouth condition of life, the hated landlord, the wordy fights with all butchers and grocers—all that and more on one side; and on the other, the self-respecting, clean, useful, friendly, thrifty way of living of the Rowleys, the considerate home life, the right interests, the peace and goodness and sureness of it all. It was all like a flash.



"You keep me, Uncle Joe," she said in a half frightened way, and he was deeply touched.

"You will be perfectly safe with me, child; don't think any more about it," he said, quietly.

"If there isn't Lonnie Lakin in good comfortable clothes, fresh and chipper looking as you can think, and with a real nice-looking man and boy! What next?" That was only one remark among many as Lonnie, again jubilant, made her way through Walnut Court.

"Mr. Rowley, as I'm alive!" ejaculated Mrs. Cook, when they arrived at her door with a sack of apples. "I'm proud to see you, and Frank, too; and, bless me, is this Lonnie! Well, I must say I'm glad to see the child, though I didn't suppose once I ever would be."

"Now, you know, Mrs. Ben, sometimes we have to let bygones be bygones. I just brought up a few apples, as fine as you'll find in Boston."

A little figure standing on a chair by the window had turned expectantly at the sound of so much talking. Lonnie went toward him and



took off her hood. After a second's puzzled hesitation, the little fellow cried out, "My Nonnie! Nonnie come back to Bennie!" and he began to jump up and down in his excitement.

"Well, who'd a thought it!" exclaimed Mr. Rowley; "that little mite of a fellow, after all this time!"

"Yes, he just never would stop talking about Lonnie. He drove me clear distracted the first week after she was gone."

"Now, that's remarkable, I say."

"Oh, you see she was always smiling at him, and joining right in with whatever he wanted, and I'm worried to death to do right by him, and always at him with a 'don't,' or 'oh, my!' or something. He just enjoyed Lonnie mightily."

"I got something for you, Mrs. Cook," said Lonnie, coming over to her, while Mr. Rowley and Frank, suspecting an embarrassment that Lonnie was far from feeling, occupied themselves with Bennie.

"You have?"

"Yes," drawing off her mitten and extracting



three nickels; "here's your fifteen cents I charged up at the meat shop and spent; and won't you please get Mr. Cook not to tell the minister and the doctor and all the people Christmas, when you come, about it? Because Mr. Rowley would be that ashamed and mortified it would be mean."

"Oh, he won't say anything; but wouldn't you be ashamed and mortified?"

"Me? Oh, come; you're foolin'!"

"Come on, father; let's go buy my suit," whispered Frank to his father, for he was to have a spick-span new Boston suit.

"Oh, lets!" for Lonnie heard it. "Say, Mrs. Cook, where's Ted?"

"He still stays at Tommy Clark's. He just won't go to school, but he says when he makes enough money on his papers to buy a suit he will go. Seems as though that boy got thinner and thinner and more solemn-like every day. I believe you were the only one ever put any laugh in him."

"Poor little fellow!" said Mr. Rowley, com-



passionately. "I know Lonnie counted on seeing him, too."

"Oh, we will see him, Uncle Joe. He's sure to be down corner of Park and Tremont waiting around with his papers. Ted just loves to wait around."

"What about Mrs. Lakin?"

Mrs. Cook shook her head.

"Her leg didn't do very badly, they say, but she was at a sort of point to break up, and she's got other things set in, and they do say she's very low indeed. I'm greatly afraid she's far from being prepared."

"If she'd a doctor like ours she'd be prepared mighty quick, wouldn't she, Uncle Joe?" said Lonnie, loftily, as to her prepared was pretty much on a par with cured.

"How's Bennie Rowley?" asked Mrs. Cook. "His stomach ever trouble him?"

"My, no," answered Lonnie, promptly, "you'd just be scandalized to see him. He sets around on the floor and makes a hearty meal off little bits of coal and string and buttons and parings,



or anything that's been dropped on the floor by accident, and then his mouth's wide open waiting for some gingerbread to drop into it; and then he's hollerin' for dinner, and ready to begin after that on pins and ashes and bits of paper and such like again."

"For mercy sake!" and Mrs. Cook surely did look scandalized.

"Come on, do let's go, father," put in Frank again; "all the suits will be gone before we get there."

"That's so. Day to you, Mrs. Ben. I'll be in for you the day before Christmas. Good-by, little Bennie."

To please Lonnie they went by Ted's stand; and there he was as usual.

"Oh, Ted, I'm so glad to see you! I'm just so glad I don't know what to do!" she cried, running toward him.

"I just believe I'm glad to see you, too, Lonnie," he said, quizzically, "blue hood and all."

"And, Ted, this is Uncle Joe Rowley and this is his boy, Frank Rowley."



"'Do," and Ted put his hand to his cap.

Mr. Rowley was at once attracted by Ted's thin, humorous, yet pathetic face, and could not help comparing the slender, poorly-clad little fellow with his own square-shouldered, muscular, well-cared-for Frank.

"You didn't live long at your mansion with the servants and carriages, did you, Lonnie?" asked Ted, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Oh, I was just boarding there a few days," with a toss of her head, "and there wasn't but one servant and one team anyway."

"Yes, I know. I've been out there."

"Oh, have you? How's Miss Joyce?"

"Boss!"

"Say, Ted, we're going to buy Frank a suit, and haven't you got money enough for yours yet? Can't you come along with us? Uncle Joe's so nice to go with. Uncle Joe, give me that apple I put in your pocket. Here, Ted, isn't that the prettiest apple you ever did see? Say, haven't you money enough?"

"I got all but a quarter for the suit I'm after."



“Good,” said Mr. Rowley ; “come right along with us and we’ll beat ’em out of the quarter.”

“Who talked about driving a bargain?” put in Frank.

“Sh-h! Got your money with you, Ted?”

“Oh, yes, I always carry it. It’s in a little bag under my shirt.”

They went to the clothing store Ted wanted to go to, and as it was the largest affair on Washington Street, it suited Frank and Mr. Rowley admirably. As Ted knew just exactly what he wanted, and as to his amazement when he asked the clerk the price of it the price proved to be the exact sum he possessed, he bought the suit at once, retired to adorn himself, and returned to the admiring group a very nice-looking boy indeed. Even his expression seemed improved.

The next business was to fit out Frank, and that was an ordeal indeed. Lonnie would have liked the most pronounced thing in the store; and everything there was looked too fine to Mr. Rowley, and he was sure they wouldn’t



wear. The clerk waiting on them finally went for another clerk, who seemed to be an expert with country boys, and the very first time he tried he picked out a suit that seemed irreproachable to all concerned. Lonnie could see it fitted excellently well ; Frank could see that he wouldn't be ashamed to wear it before the boys, and his father could see that the price suited him, and that the cloth was of a cast-iron description likely to wear.

Mr. Rowley wanted Ted to go with them to dinner, and they went to the little eating-house near the market, where Mr. Rowley had appeased his appetite for fifteen years past.

"Oyster stews for four ; rousers !" was his order, as he gazed with a beaming countenance at the three children. "Nobody ever sat down with three finer," he assured himself ; and the fun that went on at that table made people smile for ever so far around.

"This beats that time with Miss Joyce, don't it, Ted ?" said Lonnie, in a low tone.

"Yes, and good reason why," was his heart-



less answer. "Then you just spent your time bragging about what wasn't so, and now you've got the sense to let things be as they are."

"There wasn't any 'are' then," was the calm reply. "It had to be made up or nothin'. I wish you lived out at the farm!"

"What's that, Lonnie?" asked Mr. Rowley.

"I said I wished that Ted lived out at our farm," was the valiant answer.

"So do I," said Frank; "Ted's tip-top some-way."

"Well, to be sure, children do love company. But I'll tell you one thing can be, and that is Ted can come to our Christmas spread. We'll just fetch him along when we get Ben's folks."

"Oh, Uncle Joe, ain't you the best!"

"My, but that's nice, Ted," ejaculated Frank. "Why there's going to be miles of things to eat, and a plum pudding on fire, and a yule log! Honest injun!"

"I might be in the way—and eat too much," said Ted, shyly, looking at Mr. Rowley.



He burst out into a laugh. "Well said! If that don't beat all I ever heard—a thing that size, or any size, eating too much at the Rowleys'! Why, father nor son, we've never felt but glad to have folks eat! Oh, these city notions!"



## CHAPTER XII

### BOB, HARRY, AND WILDFIRE

LONNIE was running toward the barn—she fairly flew. When she entered the great barn-door she gave vent to an unearthly yell.

“For the land’s sake, what was that!” and Mr. Rowley jumped up from the keg on which he was sitting while mending a broken harness.

The yell was repeated with interest, and Lonnie burst into view.

“Lonnie! What on earth are you making such a noise for?”

“Oh! I’ve done it—and I’m coming to you before I get to thinking I won’t.” Again that shriek, but of a more modified nature.

“Done what, Lonnie?”

“Oh, Aunt Letty went out with Bennie, and I went to meddling around”—howl—“and I



truly thought I wouldn't really touch anything, you folks think so badly of such doings." Then, being sufficiently impressed by the shocked and grieved expression on Mr. Rowley's face to forget herself and how she was acting for a minute, she stopped crying and said bluntly: "I thought this was pretty, and I put it in my pocket, and I was glad I had it, and was going to hide it away somewhere. Then I thought of you, and of how the Rowleys, father and son, hated dishonest doings and cheating, and how you said to come to you, so I came. There's the thing," and she pulled out a skein of scarlet sewing silk.

It passed Mr. Rowley's comprehension how any sane human being could imperil honor, character, reputation, life, everything, for a scrap of useless color like that.

"Who'd a thought it!" was his involuntary exclamation.

"Now, what you going to do, Uncle Joe? Do you want that strap you laid onto Frank?"

"Why, Lonnie!" in a reproachful tone, "do you s'pose I'd touch a girl?"



"Well, why not, I'd like to know! I've had worse beatings than you gave him more times 'n I could count. What are you going to do?"

"Lonnie, I don't know what to do," helplessly. "Seems as though I'd ought to do or say something. Can't you think of anything?"

"Might keep me away from any dinners."

"What good would that do? You'd just help yourself out of the pantry, and mighty welcome, too."

"That's so. You might send me back to that Home—just for a spell, you know."

"This is your home for good and always. Rowleys don't go back on their word."

"Might tell Frank not to speak nor 'sociate with such a wicked child."

"I might, but it wouldn't be any manner of good. Nobody could ever make Frank dishonest. So you couldn't hurt him, and you do him a power of good with your pleasant ways."

"Well—you tell, now."

"I wish you could see it isn't right to take what isn't yours."



“Why, I know it isn’t right.”

“Then why do you do what isn’t right?”

“Nothing hard about that. It’s a heap harder to do what you know is right—if you don’t happen to like it.”

“You’re a real good little girl, Lonnie, and I am sure I would trust anything to you. And I know you will stop meddling. I’ll tell you how my father used to talk to me and my brother John. He used to say, ‘Promise yourselves that, God helping you, you’ll be fair and square and honest, and that you’ll never fail your friends, and never be mean nor unfair to an enemy; that you’ll be kind to the weak and helpless, and just to all, and live the kind of a life that will help the people around you, whoever they may be, feel that life can be a good thing, and that one can and should use every chance to grow better and truer to the good that they’re capable of.’”

All the time Lonnie, her attention caught and her heart opened with vague yearnings, was saying to herself, “Oh, Uncle Joe, but



you're so good! That's the kind you are! Please, dear God, help me be good, too!"

But when he was through she merely said: "You're dretful kind to me, Uncle Joe. I'll put the silk where I got it, and I'm sure I won't meddle any more."

"That's right. And if you do anything your heart tells you isn't frank and open you come to me about it. Yes? Promise?"

"Yes, I will," and away went Lonnie singing.

Mr. Rowley watched her meditatively, then shook his head. "She beats me. But if I only knew what to do about Frank I wouldn't mind anything else." He held his harness up to look at it. "If I could have my way I'd transport that miserable boy of Jake Rider's. Bob Rider is the meanest boy in these parts, and Harry Thomas is the next, and they are always after Frank and he is always with them—surely. A boy must have company, and they are the nearest boys his size." A vindictive jab at the leather with his awl. "Those boys set him against



his mother and kept him at it. They put him up to givin' the teacher and making trouble at school and running away. And, worse luck to both of 'em, they'd do all in their power to set him against me—and they'll be able to do it, too, if he consorts with 'em much longer! He holds out some against them, but in the nature of the case he gets more and more used to their ways and views, and first thing I know there will be the dickens to pay!" He savagely shook the harness, hung it up on its nail and went about another task. He remembered what a liking Frank seemed to take to Ted, and he seemed for a moment to think he had a new idea. "Now that little chap had a real good sort of a face, not sneaky mean like Bob Rider's, and he looked a sight smarter; nobody's fool, I'll be bound. When we have the folks down next week—Christmas—I'll make out to keep him a few days and watch him. Now, maybe he'd be company enough, and just be the savin' of Frank from those miserable boys, hang 'em!"



Mr. Rowley was not the only one in the family who viewed the Rider and Thomas boys with disfavor. Lonnie had grown excessively fond of Frank; his very slowness and staunchness and boyish strength attracted her more and more. He was with his boy friends no more than when she first came, if as much, but she noticed it more, for nefarious schemes of theirs of which she was partly cognizant had interfered wretchedly with some pet plans of hers. Also, the bullying manner they used toward her when they showed themselves around the barn filled her with wrath. Ill doings of theirs, which in themselves would have seemed to her trivial in the extreme looked very different indeed to her when she was jealously watchful over Frank's honor.

Her sharp little tongue gave vent to many a sarcastic fling in their direction, and Frank was nearly as much amused by it as his father was.

That very afternoon she had counted confidently on Frank's being willing during Mrs. Rowley's absence with Bennie to come out to



the barn and do a lot of nut-cracking and corn-shelling with her. They had planned to. But when Lonnie joyfully ran to meet him, crying, "Oh, Frank, guess what! Aunt Letty and Bennie are going to Brewsters', and we'll do the nuts and the corn. Oh, won't it be fun!"

"Oh, I can't this afternoon!"

"Can't! Why not?"

"Well, Bob and Harry want me to go with them."

"Don't go. Let's have fun."

"I promised 'em I would."

"That's nothin'; do let's do the nuts."

"I can't, so quit begging."

"'Fore I'd be tied to Bob Rider's galluses! He brags around everywhere that he can make that baby Frank Rowley do just what he wants!"

"Oh, he never! Why don't you tell a likely story."

"You think he never, but you'll find out that's so! And Harry Thomas says you haven't a soul of your own!"



“Why, I can lick Harry Thomas four times running—and Bob Rider into the bargain!”

“Maybe you can, but they don’t tell that! And if they do anything and get caught they always say you did it.”

“I know they do that, but they won’t do it very many more times.”

“Oh, yes, you can brag, and then the first time they say, ‘Come, go along with us,’ you go right along same as ever!”

“They’re the only boys around here—and they do know how to have a good time.”

“Oh, yes, they do, don’t they! I’d be ashamed, Frank Rowley! What kind of fun was it when Bob Rider was so sick and his knees so shaky he couldn’t get to his own house, and Harry Thomas all in a heap in his barn, and you comin’ in saying you had a headache and white as a sheet and scaring your father nearly stiff, and he not having suspicion enough to know what you’d been doing? Now, that was fun, wasn’t it?”

“How’d you know?” in surprise.



"Anybody but a greenie'd know that."

"Anyway, I said I'd go this afternoon, and I'm going."

Lonnie was intensely disappointed, but she shook her pretty hair with as indifferent an air as possible and said: "We'll see; you'll wish you hadn't!"

After he had gone and she had taken to "prying and meddling" in a spirit of ugly bravado, she began to imagine all sorts of things she hoped would happen to Frank and Bob and Harry to pay him back for leaving her. She pictured their planning some piece of rascality on a farmer and being caught, but the more she imagined the more real it became, until she was almost in tears for fear some of the dreadful things would happen to Frank. Next she did her best to think what it could be they meant to do. There wasn't really so very much to do. To her citified notions of what was objectionable to the police the resources of the country were quite below par. But she knew that if Bob and Harry had so worked on Frank as



to promise to be with them on a particular afternoon, whether or no, it was for some reprehensible undertaking. It might be that it was simply to resort to the old kiln in Rider's farthest pasture, where the boys had constructed a sort of lodge for their meetings, unknown, as they supposed, to any one, but familiar in its every detail to the ubiquitous Lonnie. There she knew they gathered themselves and read or detailed extraordinary romances from worn, and, to her, unenticing-looking paper books treasured by Bob Rider as the receptacle of daring and adventure. She knew the names of some of these books—"Dare-devil Dick," "The Pirate Band," "The Red-handed Mystery." She knew that there they had some very dirty cards, and some tobacco; but those things seemed like such trifles to her that she could not see wherein lay their charm. That they really did not charm Frank she knew; and that he should desert her for those boys and such poor fun galled her. She was sure it must be something else this afternoon. Going up to the



old mill for bats—no, it couldn't be that. Rat hunting in Thomas' barn—she didn't believe it was that. But there was one thing she did think it might be, and it frightened her. She was perfectly well aware how Bob and Harry hated Farmer Gates. How incensed they were at everything he did and said; how mad they were because he would not let them so much as get a look at his new young stallion, Wildfire, and how they had planned many a long day to get him out and ride him, deterred by only one thing—their own fear of Wildfire. Perhaps they had got a scheme now for getting him out. Of course, they wouldn't do much themselves. That is why they would want Frank, to bear the blame in case of discovery. Frank was absolutely undaunted by any sort of physical undertaking. Once he had made up his mind to do a thing, no thought of fear of the consequences seemed able to enter into his calculations.

The more Lonnie thought of it the surer she became that she had solved the mystery. It was known that Gates had gone to Boston that



morning. It was rumored that he was bargaining for the sale of Wildfire, and the boys were likely to think it was now or never.

It was growing late and the sun was very low on the horizon.

"Lonnie," called Mr. Rowley, "hasn't Frank come back yet?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know where he went?"

"No, sir."

"I feel worried about him some way. Still, it isn't supper time; he'll be home by then. I've got to go to Brewsters' now for your Aunt Letty and Bennie. Want to come? I can squeeze you in."

She had wanted to go and had hoped he would ask her. But a half formed design was floating in her mind.

"No, sir; I guess not. Frank went with Bob Rider—and Harry."

"Yes, I suppose so;" then giving vent to his indignation, "I wish they'd leave my boy alone."



"I'd like to shoot 'em!" said Lonnie, glad to have sympathy.

Mr. Rowley laughed. "You're pretty dangerous for your size! Keep the room warmed up for Bennie. Good-by."

"Good-by," and after she had seen him drive away she looked out at the sky, already a dull, dark gray, as though threatening snow.

"He ought to be back. I guess I'll go. Can't do any hurt, anyway."

She put on her coat and her red mittens and hood and her all-colored scarf—she had never had such nice, new, warm things before—and saw to the fire and shut the doors and started. It was a mile by the road to the Gates place and three-quarters across lots, and it was almost too dark to see already; no sign of stars. The moon would not rise until after midnight. But then if she went across lots she would reach the pasture, where the boys would be most likely to take Wildfire to try him, before she came to the farm buildings.



She went as fast as she could, so as to make the best use of the little light there was; but she fell into a hole, and then ran against a fence, bumping herself considerably.

“If I do that many more times,” she thought ruefully, “there won’t be very much of me left to find Frank. Guess I’ll go slower and have more sense.” She had been guiding herself by the great oak on the top of the hill, but now she reached that she was afraid she would lose her way. Presently she saw a light east of her. “There, that’s in Gates’ house, and I can see it until I reach the hollow back of the barn lot, and that’s where I want to go.”

She made her way carefully, gradually becoming accustomed to the light until she could see more than at first.

When she reached the hollow she was in great doubt as to which way to turn. She had made up her mind positively that Frank was in trouble in the next lot. If he wasn’t, she had taken her walk for nothing, and it would be a question whether she could get home before Mr.



Rowley returned. She struck down across the hollow, now able to outline some hayricks against the sky on the opposite side. As she drew nearer she heard voices. She stopped, her heart beating fiercely.

"It's as black as a pocket. I'm not going to stay here all night."

Bob Rider's voice.

"That fool of a horse will come ramping up here next and kill us, like as not."

Harry Thomas' voice.

Lonnie felt like screaming out "Frank!" but a strange fear kept her quiet.

"I hope he hasn't tramped Frank to death!"

Lonnie's breath almost stopped.

"Well, we couldn't fetch him. He groaned like thunder when we tried to move him."

"Yes, we might have broken something about him dragging him—and that beast came pounding into us all!"

Frank was hurt and they had left him! She wanted to scream out and accuse them, but some instinct told her to be quiet.



“We’re in for it now,” sullenly; “and it’s all your fault, Bob Rider!”

“Shut up! We’d better give our minds to getting out of this scrape. Wildfire will stake himself as sure as fate!”

“If Frank—if Frank—if Frank don’t come to, nobody’ll know it was anybody but him.”

“If he does come to we can swear it wasn’t us.”

“But he’ll say it was!”

“We will be two to one!”

“But nobody would believe us, anyway. My, I wish we could have got him across.”

“Well, we couldn’t! we’ve got to get out of here. I feel’s though it was most morning.”

“’Tain’t six yet.”

“I bet it is—long ago.”

“Let’s start. I don’t hear that animal around here. I’ll bet he’s down at the far end of the lot where Frank is.”

“Well, come on. I can’t see a thing!”

“When we get out of this bogie hollow we can see the light from the house, and get home.”



“I’ve heard there was hants in this hollow.”

“Shut up! I rather hants than anybody alive. I’d kill any person here that was going to tell on me! Dad says one thing more and he’s going to do for me!”

“Oh, I wish we had Frank!” and Harry began to whimper.

“Shut up!” snarled Bob, striking out at him savagely.

“Oh, I hear something!” quavered Harry.

“Come on, then, quick; let’s go together!”

Lonnie had almost cried out aloud. Now, pursuing a sudden inspiration, she gave a long, low, unearthly shriek.

Bob gave a yell and dashed away from Harry. Lonnie moaned.

Bob lunged forward, almost touching her, tripped on a stone and fell.

Lonnie howled again, and finding she was near enough to Bob to touch him, she pulled his hair vindictively, but she was afraid to do anything more to him—he was breathing and moaning in such a fearful fashion. She heard



Harry tearing across the hollow, crying frantically.

But now for Frank. Oh, Frank! She passed the haystacks and tried to go as fast as possible toward what she supposed was the far end of the field. "Oh, Frank! I'm comin'," she thought. "Oh, Frank! Dear God, help me be a good girl! Dear God, help me get Frank and don't let him be killed, and I'll be the best you ever saw all the whole time. Oh, Frank! Oh, Frank!" Then she called, "Frank! Frank!" No answer. She stopped and listened,

Everything was so deadly quiet.

She went forward a short distance and listened intently.

She heard a sound like heavy breathing. With wide staring eyes and parted lips she crept along toward the sound.

"Frank!" she whispered.

No answer.

She could see a dark mass on the ground beside her. She put out her hand. She felt the rough cloth of a boy's clothes. She passed her



hand along and felt buttons, then slightly warm flesh, a face; Frank's—and he was breathing. “Oh, Frank!” she sobbed, almost breaking down and laying her cheek beside his. “Oh, Frank! and he's alive! Oh, dear Father, I thank you so much, and I will—will keep my promise—long's I can!”

Her arm around Frank seemed to hurt him, for he groaned.

Then she heard another sound. A terrible sound in the night—a snorting and wild pawing.



## CHAPTER XIII

### A BAD HOUR

WILDFIRE was coming, Lonnie knew that. Perhaps he was coming straight toward them.

Still that wild snorting.

She could see him. Almost screaming, she rose hastily and began to sing her very loudest. "Baby Mine" rang out, her voice as sweet and clear and true as though she had never had a fear in the world.

Wildfire stopped a few feet from them—Lonnie thought she could feel his hot breath and see his eyes blaze—pawed the ground till dirt and stones rattled, and, head toward them, kept prancing in a circle. As he turned, so did Lonnie. "He's the Lily of the Valley" came next, the notes gaining a curiously melodious softness as they were carried through the cold, still, night air.



Mr. Gates, returning from the city and driving straight to the barn, at once missed his stallion. Half dazed and enraged almost beyond the point of action, he went to the rear of his barn, swinging his lantern; and there, as he heard the strange, sweet singing, Lonnie saw the lantern.

"Help!" she cried. "Help, quick!" and then, guessing with intuitive rapidity that it was Mr. Gates, looking for his lost Wildfire, she shouted in her clear, bell-like tones:

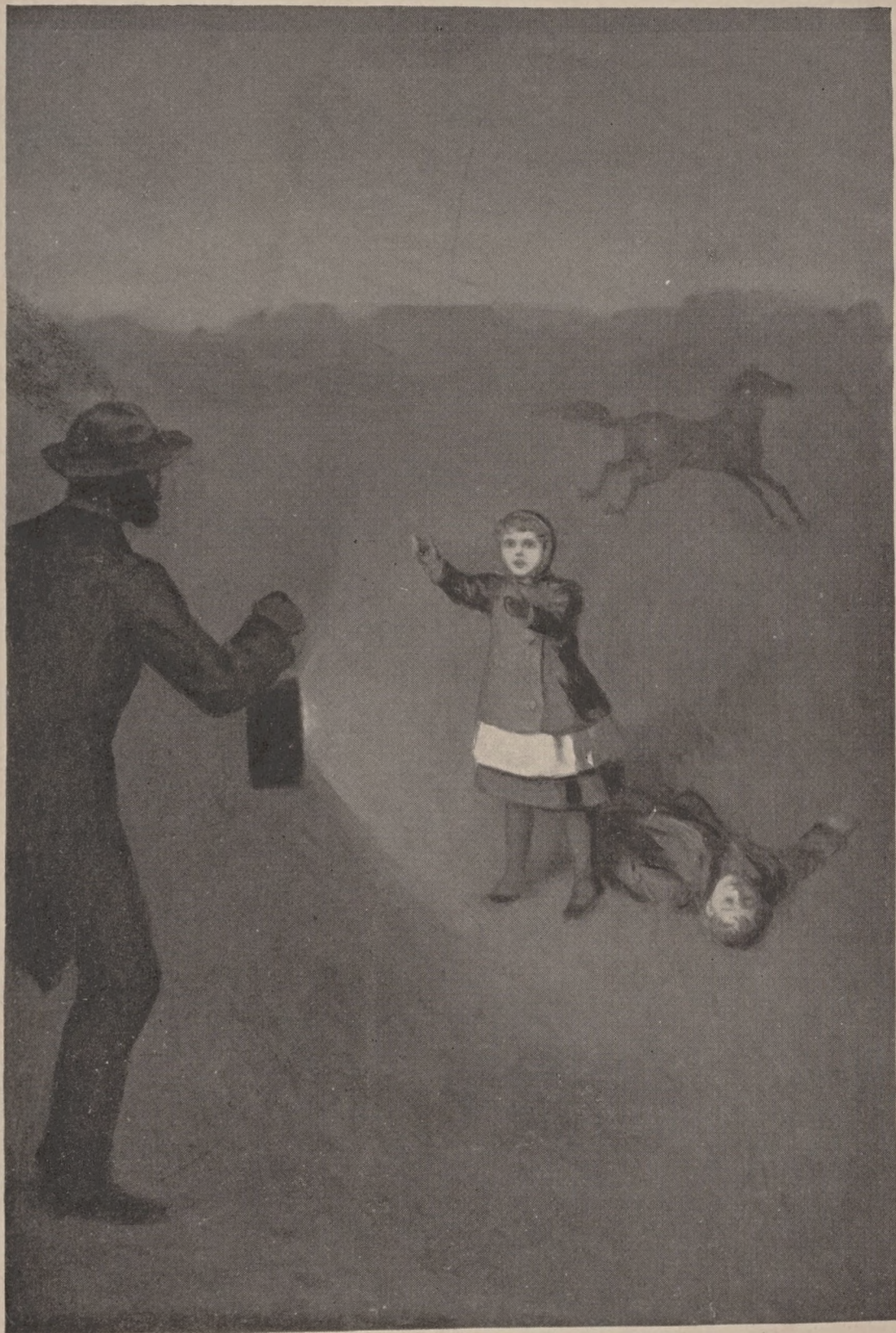
"Mr. Gates! Wildfire is over here in the south lot!"

Farmer Gates was not the only one who heard the singing. As his bobbing lantern drew nearer and nearer to the little group in the lot, another lantern started from the house, making even faster time.

The Thomas house was on the Rowleys' way home from Brewsters'.

"I'll just stop, I guess, Letty, if you can wait a minute, and see if Harry is home; it will ease my mind. I've felt sort of upset all the way home."





"HELP!" SHE CRIED; "HELP, QUICK!"  
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As he was making his way around to the kitchen door he almost ran into a crying boy.

“This you, Harry Thomas! What’s the matter?”

“Oh, the ghost! Frank’s d-d-dead!”

“What do you mean, boy? Speak up plain!”

“His ghost nearly killed me! Oh! Oh! Oh! Frank Rowley—he’s dead over at Gates’—oh! oh! oh!”

Mr. Rowley never waited for another word. He rushed back to his buggy, sprang in, lashed the horse and sped on his way to the Gates’.

“Frank!” was all he said, and Mrs. Rowley held Bennie pressed closely to her and asked no questions.

“Come in, Letty; Pete’ll stand,” and he dashed to the house.

“Frank?” he said, at the kitchen door.

The surprise on the women’s faces, the quiet, home-like scene, the ordinary preparations for supper, helped bring him to himself.

“Frank’s not here,” said Mrs. Gates. “David



just now drove past to the barn ; perhaps you'd like to step out and see him. Here ; here's a lighted lantern. Well, here's Mrs. Rowley and Bennie ! Come right in !" and as they went in, Mr. Rowley went toward the barn. Before reaching it he heard that singing—that strange, strange singing—and he knew it was Lonnie's voice. His heart gave a bound of relief. Lonnie would never sing that way if Frank were dead.

He followed the light of Mr. Gates' lantern, and as he drew near him, Wildfire, attracted by the light, also came near ; but as the light of their lanterns flashed on him, he gave a loud snort and dashed away like the wind.

"Here—here we are, right here !" called Lonnie. But now that some one had come, her voice had a weak little tremble in it, and she sank down beside Frank. The lanterns showed the little forlorn figure and the prostrate boy, face upwards and eyes closed.

"Oh, my boy !" groaned Mr. Rowley, and kneeled down beside him. The labored breath-



ing, the beating heart, asserted loudly enough that the boy was certainly not dead. But except for his groans when touched he gave no sign of consciousness.

“Bad business; bad, very bad! I’ll go get something and we’ll carry him up to the house.” So, while Mr. Rowley knelt there in a sort of dumb agony, Farmer Gates went for a small door he unhinged from the barn. They raised the moaning boy on it, and as carefully as possible carried him to the house, while Lonnie swung both lanterns to light the way. The hired man had already taken the Rowley buggy and gone for the doctor. Frank was laid on the wide old lounge, the women bent over him, unloosed his clothes, applied hot water and cold water, as it seemed good to one or the other of them at the moment; gave him things to smell, and Mrs. Gates tried to force a few drops of blackberry cordial into his mouth. Lonnie, by his head, jealously mounted guard. She was determined nothing should be done to hurt him, and she would not leave him a second. All the questions



that one and another found time to ask she resolutely left unanswered. She had not decided what to say, and the whole story was to be told first to Uncle Joe.

When the doctor came, Frank was quite conscious. He tried to tell where he was hurt, but it only seemed to result in his being hurt all over; his head hurt, he said, and his shoulders, and his back, and his legs.

The doctor, after a grave silence of proper professional duration, smiled reassuringly at Mr. Rowley. "He's badly shaken, very. And he has had the narrowest sort of an escape, but I don't believe he has a broken bone and I don't believe he has any internal injury, though there is still a chance of that. If you keep him quiet for a few days and notify me at once if there is any fever or delirium, or complaint of any unusual pain anywhere, I guess that is as much as we can do. You can take him home to-night in the road wagon."

When Mr. Gates heard the outcome of it he said somewhat grimly: "Well, I reckon now



I better go and look after my stallion—if there's anything left of him worth looking after. Gus is out there all this time."

It was the first time that the thought of how Frank happened to be lying in Mr. Gates' south lot had entered Mr. Rowley's mind. Now that the crushing fear of physical injury to Frank was lifted, it was replaced by a sickening dread lest Frank had done something disgraceful. What did it all mean? Involuntarily he turned to Lonnie. She had been watching him. She knew perfectly well what he was thinking about. And in a moment she found opportunity to squeeze his hand and whisper, "Frank's good enough for anybody; don't you mind!"

Again Mr. Gates came in and with so grave a face that every one turned to him expectantly.

"We seem to be having accidents enough for one night. Doctor, you are needed now, sure—for Bob Rider. Gus found him in the hollow, and we have carried him out to the Rowleys' buggy. We thought you could get him home



in that. His foot is crushed. Wildfire trod on it. Might just as well have been his head."

Lonnie's eyes were stretched wide open. If she only hadn't pulled Bob's hair!

The doctor gave a somewhat anxious look at Frank and said cheerfully: "Oh, a foot's nothing! We'll have that all right in no time!"

The others, taking the cue, refrained from making the matter a topic of conversation, but it was a hard trial.

"I hope I'll be able to stay out this time until I get hold of Wildfire," and Mr. Gates strode out again, evidently in a not improving humor.

It was not a very cheerful party that he left. Mrs. Rowley was trying to hush Bennie, Lonnie kept softly dabbing cologne on Frank's head, Frank groaned uneasily at short intervals. The Gates women were evidently straining their ears for the next coming of Mr. Gates, and Mr. Rowley was in momentarily increasing anguish as he realized the relation between



Wildfire and Frank and Mr. Gates' shortness of manner. The more he thought of it the more he dreaded to have Mr. Gates come back, until, when he actually heard his step on the porch, he averted his face.

"All's well!" was the cheery remark when the door opened, and every face brightened as though by magic. "Got Wildfire in his stall all right, and not a hair on him hurt. Shake hands, neighbor Rowley. I feel better. I feel a sight more like a Christian when my pocket-book isn't touched. Truth! Just as soon as I found out Frank wasn't dangerously hurt, I got to thinkin' about Wildfire, and like to went crazy. You see, just this very day I closed up a bargain up city that will put fifteen hundred dollars in the bank to-morrow at noon if I can hand over Wildfire in good condition. And I thought it was all up with me all for a crowd of meddling boys—no offense, neighbor." But Mr. Rowley winced.

"Now, Bob Rider, his foot's mashed sure; how they'll fix that up is more than I can see."



Mr. Rowley glanced at Frank, but it did not seem as though he heard, and Lonnie was shading him from the light. "But if anything on earth could do Bob Rider any good it'll be that. He will have to stay in the house out of mischief. He's a bad, bad boy. Now, your Frank, neighbor, always had a right good name until lately; but he's been in bad company, and you can't touch pitch and so on. You've been remiss, that's what I think, as well as some others I could name. And now likely this will be a good thing all around. You see, there was something wrong somewhere. These boys and Wild-fire didn't all come in my south lot by accident. It's a mystery to me where Harry Thomas was!"

"He's been over here, too," and Mr. Rowley briefly detailed his meeting with the weeping Harry.

"Well, do tell! It won't be a bad thing for Harry, especially as Bob will be tied down to the house."

"If we may take your road wagon, we'll be getting home, I think, now," said Mr. Rowley.



“Doctor said we could take Frank, and we’d best get along.”

So the wagon was brought out, and a comfortable place fixed for Frank ; the others got in, and very slowly the borrowed horse walked his mile to the Rowley homestead.

Once home, and Frank comfortably fixed on the kitchen lounge for the night, Lonnie flew around with all the energy in the world getting supper, and as Mrs. Rowley, who was thoroughly worn out by all the excitement and by holding Bennie, said more than once: “It was wonderful how well she did for such a little girl.”

Mrs. Rowley and Bennie went to bed together, and Lonnie was preparing to follow, after she had taken a last look at the quietly sleeping Frank, when Mr. Rowley said: “Now, Lonnie, I’ve waited about as long as I can—do tell me all you know about it.”

So Lonnie told her tale from beginning to end, encouraged by a friendly pat, or an exclamation of sympathy or assent.



“I just knew it was Mr. Gates’ stallion. I don’t know how I knew, but I was sure of it; and it got dark before I got over there. And I was so scared at those boys, for Bob he said he would kill anybody that he caught knowing about it, and I thought he would; and after all, he was so scared he couldn’t even get up when I made noises! I did make lovely, dreadful noises! If I hadn’t been so scared about Frank it would have been the most fun ever was! Harry Thomas just went boo-hooing as fast as he could, but Bob Rider was worse. He couldn’t go at all.

“And then I found Frank, and if I hadn’t heard him breathe such a funny, loud way, I would have thought he was dead; and I didn’t have time to know how dreadful bad I did feel until I heard that animal—and I’ll never like that kind of an animal again! It had breath like our stove oven, and eyes like a teeny bright fire in the dark; and I sang right at him, and he danced to it—I saw him my own self; and if you make a promise to God when you’re scared,



does it be any good when you're done being scared?"

"Of course."

"Well, I don't think so! For if God knows everything He knows how comfortable you are going to feel in a little while, and not scared any, and that then you won't think much of such a promise, and so He wouldn't be fooled a bit, nor put any trust in it—so it isn't any good promise. If you promised me something, and I knew all the time you didn't mean it, you wouldn't be cheating me with that promise!"

"Goodness! child, I can't make head nor tail out of that! But if you promised anything to God, or to a person, the right thing is to stick to it. What did you promise?"

"Oh, I just promised what Miss Joyce said I ought to pray for every day."

"What was that?"

"Oh, to be, you know—good—and all that."

"Well, don't you want to keep it?"

"Why, sort of; but I don't want to get good too quick. It's bad for the health."



Mr. Rowley laughed.

“Good-night. You look real pale, and I can see you’re all worn out. A long sleep will do you a lot of good. I’m going to lie down here beside Frank. I know you’ve saved Frank’s life, Lonnie. But I can’t any more’n say I know it now.”

“Oh, Uncle Joe, I didn’t, neither!” and she went to her bit of a room happy from head to foot.



## CHAPTER XIV

### PREPARATIONS

THE verdict of the doctor next day, that Frank had sustained no injury, but was badly shaken up and must remain quiet for a few days, was satisfactory to every one in the house. Mrs. Rowley was glad that the Christmas festivities could go on, Lonnie was glad that Frank would be obliged to be around home for a while, and Mr. Rowley himself felt as though it would be a great thing to know where to put his finger on his eldest son.

Frank could hardly be persuaded to speak to any one. When he was awake during that first night, his father lying on the floor near the lounge or sitting in a rocking-chair close by, he kept his eyes shut and tried to seem asleep. He was desperately ashamed of himself. He could not bear to look his father in the face. So



cloudy had been his senses that he did not know the condition of Wildfire, and he did not know exactly what had happened to the other boys. He did not know even whether he himself was or was not seriously injured. He felt so aching that his private opinion was that he was not far from the grave. He would ask no questions, and was acutely miserable.

Mr. Rowley was out at the barn with the doctor, Mrs. Rowley was in the buttery cheerfully engaged with some of her Christmas preparations, and Lonnie was amusing Bennie beside Frank's lounge. She looked up at him suddenly and saw him hastily shut his eyes.

"'Course I knew he wasn't asleep; what does make him act so?" she thought.

"Say, Frank," she said in a most matter-of-fact tone, "I know you're not asleep. You needn't be bothering about anything. Wildfire's all right. He wasn't a bit hurt." Frank's eyes popped open. "Mr. Gates took him to Boston to-day, and he's going to get a million dollars for him, or something. And you're not hurt bad



a bit. You'll be around in no time, and Christmas is going on just the same, and if you'll only open your eyes and talk we'll have a lot of fun. You and I can fix the greens and trimmings and pick out nuts, and do every kind of a thing."

"What about Bob and Harry?"

"Well, Harry is the scarest thing you ever saw! They say he cried pretty near all night, and his mother or somebody has to stay right with him every minute. He saw a ghost, and that's the worst thing could happen to him!"

"What about Bob?"

"Bob—oh, well, Bob! Bob got off mighty easy, considering the way he and Harry ran off and left you in that south lot for Wildfire to tramp on! He saw a ghost, too, and he was so scared he just lay flat on the ground and couldn't move, and Wildfire came along and instead of tramping on his head or his ribs, or some killing place, he just tramped on his foot."

"Well?"

"Oh! they amplified his foot this morning early—in the night—soon as the doctor could



get some one to help him—to keep it from being ashamed.”

“What are you talking about?”

“They cut his foot off.”

“Oh!” and Frank relapsed into a horrified silence.

“Now, I wouldn’t go to feeling bad about that. Everybody says having his foot cut off may save him from hanging. That would be cheap. I heard him my own self say that he and Harry Thomas were going to swear they didn’t have anything to do with it, and that you were the only one.”

“Oh, I knew that well enough before I went. They always do that.”

“I wouldn’t care about spending my time with boys as sneaky as that.”

“I had decided not to go again after this time.

“You were one time too late, sure!”

“Lonnie—what did father say?”

“You ninny, what’d you suppose he’d say! For jes’ soft-headedness about anybody I never saw the beat of Uncle Joe over you! Just



almost dead for fear you were hurt bad, and too glad to speak when he found you weren't. That's Uncle Joe!"

"You needn't to think father wouldn't be cut up by my trying to fool with another man's horse!"

"Cut up? 'course he's cut up! But I expect he keeps trying to tell himself you'll never, never do anything like that again."

"I never will," fervently.

"You'll do worse if you rather pick out low-down sneaks like Bob Rider to play with, than somebody decent."

"But I won't."

"Then you'd ought to tell your father so, for he's all in misery because he hasn't brought you up better. You jes' ought to heard Mr. Gates talk to him! Said he'd been remiss letting you go with bad boys, and blaming him for your fault."

"Honest truth?"

"Honest; and he said everybody said the same thing, and Uncle Joe's hands just rubbing



each other because he felt too bad to keep 'em still."

Frank groaned, shut his eyes and refused to talk. After a long pause, Lonnie began again. "Now, you needn't to go get dumpy. If you told your father that, honest Injun, you were going to do his way, and be like he wants you to be, he'd smile from here to town, and you know it. There never was anybody so easy pleased as Uncle Joe—was there, Bennie?" kissing the little toddler. "I'll tell you a story if you like, Frank."

"You don't know any."

"Yes I do, too, lots of 'em. I'll tell you a funny one. I used to tell 'em to Ted."

"Well, go on."

And she went on with such admirable success that when Mr. Rowley came into the house feeling rather down-hearted by his son's intentional silence, he found him laughing and in the best of spirits.

"It takes Lonnie, and that's a fact," he thought to himself.



"Come on, Bennie, we'll go see Aunt Letty and get some gingerbread and some milk—good—come on! You'll have to walk, though! Stand up there! Oh, my, what a good walker!"

"How you feeling, Frank? Better?" Mr. Rowley tried to speak in an off-hand, cheerful way; but it was a poor attempt.

"You won't ever like me any more, will you father?" said Frank, gloomily. "I'm glad Wildfire wasn't hurt, but he might just as well have been for all me. Seems like I was possessed. I just made up my mind to do it, no matter what happened, and I did; and I'd just ought to had my neck broken. I knew I ought all the time."

"There, there, Frank! Everything's all right, and just let's start afresh. That's the way to do! No use my telling you this or that—seems as though you must see the rights of things as well as I can. Christmas is coming, and you are going to be sound as a nut, so let's put in and be happy. You needed somebody to play with. What do you say to this?" confidentially.



“When I go up town next Wednesday to get Ben’s folks and Ted, why, if you like Ted, and he can, we’ll just have him stay all winter to help you with the chores, and make company at school, an’ all.”

Frank’s eyes shone. “Oh, that’ll just be jolly! I did think I liked Ted a lot. He seemed such an awful sensible little feller. Lonnie’d like it, too.”

“Well, we ought to do something to please Lonnie. Like enough I’d been a broken-hearted man to-day if it hadn’t been for Lonnie’s pluck and sense. She beats everything ever I saw for such a little girl—or any size girl—or any size boy—or man, either! I declare Lonnie does beat all for goodness and badness, and smartness and stupidity, and everything!”

Frank laughed.

“She’s just Lonnie, I guess. If you want to please her, get her a jew’s-harp or a mouth-organ. I never did see anybody so crazy to make music.”

On the next Wednesday afternoon all was



expectation in the Rowley homestead. Mrs. Rowley, in the gayest of ribbons and snowiest of aprons, had received compliments galore from both Frank and Lonnie, and was bustling about putting on last touches, although the last of last touches had actually been given a good two hours before. She would go to Brother Ben's room and put another stick of wood in the already red-hot little wood stove, "so little Bennie Cook wouldn't be taking cold, bless him;" trotting to the pantry, where that most noble array of Christmas dishes, enough to make an epicure's mouth water to distraction, was ranked in orderly rows; or stopping to give Bennie another pat on his tow head, and straighten his very-much-tucked white dress under his gingham creeper, which he was to wear until the last moment, so that he might thus appear in unaccustomed glory.

Lonnie, in a red dress, new, and a white apron, new, was so beamingly happy that her pretty little face was prettier than ever.

Frank, still anxiously looked at if he under-



took to move around in anything but a funereal manner, wore his new suit, and with the help of a necktie and delightfully clean handkerchief, proved to be a very fascinating object to himself and particularly to Bennie. Since Frank's incarceration he and Bennie had struck up a great friendship, and Frank's uniform kindness and patience with the little fellow had won him golden opinions from his step-mother.

The table was set, not with the splendor reserved for next day, but the linen was at least second-best, and what was necessary of the rosebud china was displayed to the best advantage. And the supper was all ready except for its last turn, which was to send it to the table smoking hot. The room was festooned with greens, running pine and cedar branches, and scarlet berries and all sorts of the spoils of the woods gave the roomy kitchen-dining-room a most Christmas-like and holiday appearance.

"Sun's setting red as blood," announced Frank; "just makes the whole snow pink."

"Oh, I do hear the bells this time!"



“You’ve heard them a dozen times already!”

“But I do! I really do hear them this time!”

Everybody listened, even Bennie, apparently; and, sure enough, very faintly at first, and then clearer and louder on the still air came the jingling of sleigh-bells.

“They’re coming!” gasped Mrs. Rowley, and, diving into Brother Ben’s room, in went another stick in the stove, her apron and ribbons were given a dozen little taps in a second before the glass, the oven door was opened and clapped to, the stewpan of gravy was hastily stirred, Bennie was seized, kissed rapturously, and his creeper quickly removed, and then the sleigh came jingling up to the side porch, and there were sounds of talking and laughing and whoaing, and then stamping on the steps, while the open door let out a flood of warm light, and Mrs. Rowley, all but weeping in her excitement, cried out, “Oh, Brother Ben!” and then embraced Mrs. Cook and seized Bennie and hurried him into the house.



“Here I am!” shrieked Lonnie, wild with excitement, and then, catching sight of Ted, she embraced him ecstatically, and Frank grasped him by both hands, and they led him in triumph to the stove.

“Well, Frank, hear you’ve been trying to kill yourself!” said Uncle Ben, jovially, while Mrs. Cook exclaimed over Bennie Rowley.

Bennie Cook, as soon as he had recovered the use of his arms and legs and eyes, attached himself placidly to Lonnie, and was not to be persuaded from attendance upon her.

“Bennie’s pitty Nonny ; Bennie ’oves her—um—um !” and Lonnie, very proud of his preference, smiled delightedly upon him.

Into Brother Ben’s room the family went, but speedily returned to the sitting-room. By the time Mr. Rowley came in, the fried chicken, and the mashed potatoes, and the soda biscuits, and the little taste of bacon and new eggs, and baked apples, and fragrant coffee, and preserves galore, and jellies and cake of a lightness to challenge a thistledown, were all set forth on



the table and the feast went on with a good will.

Mr. Rowley kept his eyes on Ted to make sure that the little fellow's fear of eating too much should not get the better of him. As Ted warmed up to the business before him and perceived the nonchalant manner in which Frank partook of the good things as of things to which he was, on the whole, well accustomed, he took heart and ate as much as he wanted, and even ventured a remark to Frank or Lonnie. Lonnie's very much at-home manners, her pretty clothes, and the warm praise Mr. Rowley had bestowed upon her while conversing with the Cooks on the ride out, impressed him more than he could express.

Lonnie!—and people not saying how bad she was! And not so very pert, and not a bit mean, and with that particularly bold, defiant, self-defensive look on her face which was becoming very noticeable before she left Boston, quite gone—replaced by a bright, quick, but kindly expression. He couldn't understand it.



"Now, if I lived here," he thought, "what would I get to look like?"

"If you lived here," said Lonnie, as though in answer to his thought, "you would soon enough lose that thin, watching kind of a look, and you'd act as though you had something else to do besides just waiting around. Frank's awful nice! You're to sleep with him, I guess. We're going to pop corn after supper and make candy, too!"

"Not more eating!" and Ted looked more nearly astonished than he ever had before in his life.

Every one heard the remark, and it called forth a good-natured laugh.

"Look! both the Bennies are sound asleep," chuckled Frank. And Bennie Rowley beside his mother, his fat, red cheeks distended by a goodly chicken bone still protruding from his little red lips, was sound asleep, leaning back in his high chair; and Bennie Cook, beside his mother, was asleep with his head bowed clear over to his plate.



Their mothers rose, each beamingly proud of her own particular offspring, and bore them away to bed; and after much exchanging of confidences, and advice, and admiring compliments, they returned to the kitchen.

Lonnie had cajoled the boys into helping her, and the clearing up was so well under way that it took only a few minutes to remove all trace of that goodly supper.

“Now for the popper and the corn! Frank, you can pop first, because you’ve been sick.”

“No, Ted can, because he’s company.”

“No, Lonnie, you can, because you’re a girl.”

“All right; I’ll pop first,” and while the elder people talked business and compared notes, and were hugely sociable, the white corn popped in the popper, and was salted and buttered; and then the molasses candy was made with even more excitement. Some was pulled, some was cooled in tins full of snow, some was eaten, some was dropped around promiscuously, but great plates of it were put away for the morrow.

Such candy! pulled as white as it could be;



pulled in twists ; a great deal that was darker in sticks ; plates of it in little round balls ; pans of it made with walnuts and hickory nuts, and thin crackling rolls of it.

Ted became so enthusiastic that his philosophical spirit only cropped out at intervals, and then in such quaint sallies that Frank was almost in tears for laughing.

Mr. Rowley could hardly keep his eyes off the group, and it was well he wasn't absolutely needed in the conversation of the others.

"Hear that boy laugh," he thought ; "and I declare sometimes it would be a year that I'd never hear him laugh at home. He's been brought up too quiet for anything ; just that old deaf Nancy keeping house for me, and taking care of him, and then no children ; nobody but those rascally boys ; no merry-making except what had something wrong in it ; and him naturally down-hearted like all the Rowleys, except John Rowley, my brother ; and now hear him laugh, and see how bright he looks ! Lonnie's helped him wonderfully, but



she has to bide in the house with Bennie too much to be enough company ; and now Ted, he could help him in all his chores, and for all he won't go to school up city I can tell from the cut of his head he'd like books and be smart at them. Now, he's just the one," and his mind kept running on the subject until the whole tired, cheerful group broke up for the night.



## CHAPTER XV

### CHRISTMAS DAY

MISS JOYCE looked at Maggie in a meditative manner.

“I do believe that I can take time to drive over to the Rowleys to-day and take Lonnie and Ted a present. Ted said he was going to be there for Christmas; did I tell you?”

“Yes, ma’am. And it’s the prettiest Christmas Day I remember seeing these long years. I was sort of hoping you’d be sending Lonnie something, and I made a little sachet bag for her. She was the nicest little body, if she was so everlastin’ lively!”

“They like her very much, I understand, and want to keep her. I shall be glad to hear what Mrs. Rowley says, myself, and to see Lonnie.”

“When I’m busy around the kitchen, here, I can just see that child working away at those



pants, and time and again I've been fairly obliged to set down and laugh at the very thought."

Miss Joyce laughed, too; and a short time later, with three small boys tucked in beside her, was on her way to the Rowleys. The sleighing was fine, the day wonderfully beautiful, and she felt that she was getting up a fine appetite for the three dinners she was booked to appear at to-day.

She was wholly unprepared for the Rowley place in its Christmas aspect. When she went in the living-room and saw the way it had been opened up into the sitting-room, how the enormous fireplace had been exposed to view, though at present filled with cedar, how the long table had been set, reaching through both rooms, how walls and ceilings and table were all decorated in every conceivable spot with greens, then she admitted some people could keep Christmas yet. It was a sight to cheer one's heart.

"There has been no trouble spared here, Mrs. Rowley," said Miss Joyce, admiringly.



“No, indeed; we all worked. The Rowleys were always great at keeping Christmas, but I don’t believe any more was ever done than this year. You’ll sure stay to dinner, won’t you, Miss Joyce?”

Miss Joyce told of her three dinners already arranged for, and said she had a little present for Lonnie and Ted.

“Now, Lonnie’ll be delighted. She just deserves presents, she surely does.”

“Lonnie and Frank and Ted, and the two Bennies and Brother Ben and Mr. Rowley are all out at the barn fixing up the yule log to drag in after the dinner table’s out of the way. You must stop there before you go. And I want you to see my pantry.”

“Indeed you ought. I never saw such a sight in my life!” put in Mrs. Cook.

So to the pantry and the buttery they all went, and Miss Joyce was as sincerely taken aback by the display as the most demanding could have wished.

“I’m just going to put a nut cake and a



sack of doughnuts in your sleigh; those three little boys can eat 'em. There, they've gone to the barn at last, and now they'll have fun."

"Some one has been having a Christmas present," smiled Miss Joyce, noticing a conspicuously new upright piano.

"There, now, that's really for Lonnie. Mr. Rowley wanted so bad to do something to please Lonnie, and he knew nothing would do so well as an instrument of some sort, so we planned for him to give the piano to me for a Christmas present—me, with no more music in me than a calf, nor as much—and then for me to say Lonnie could play on it for my present to her, and Mr. Rowley to have Abigail Gates to come over and give her some lessons for his present. Abigail's quite a player. Lonnie, when she found I'd got that piano—when it was brought in from the barn this morning—went pretty near crazy. If it had been given to her straight out she'd be a-settin' there this minute with her head as high as a church steeple,



and that would have been the end of her; but now, you see, she's enjoying herself other ways as well, and on her good behavior to get to play it. Going? Be sure to go to the barn. Good-by! Yes, I'll give it to Lonnie; she'll be greatly pleased. Thank you. Good-by! And so will Ted, too."

Out at the barn Miss Joyce found the assembled group hilariously decorating the great tree trunk to be dragged into the house to the fireplace. There seemed to be an endless amount of molasses candy and popcorn, whichever way you turned. Her three little boys had their mouths painfully full and their pockets stuffed.

Ted went straight up to Miss Joyce with a glad smile and a happy welcome in his voice. Mr. Rowley was warmly cordial, Frank greeted her with boyish awkwardness, and Lonnie, when she first looked up, ran to Miss Joyce, crying out: "Oh, I am so glad! Merry Christmas! Come, do come and see our piano! Oh, it's beautiful!"



Miss Joyce kissed the fresh little rosy face, and was surprised to see how glad she was to hear that sweet, musical little voice again.

“Maggie sent you a present, Lonnie.”

“Oh, how kind; how very kind! Tell her I’ll never forget how lovely she was. I wish I could send her something. Oh, I’ll send her a Christmas wreath I made, and it has real holly in it, this one has, and I’ll send her some nuts, and you tell her I gathered them and cracked them myself!”

“Dear me, child,” said Mr. Rowley, “I don’t believe even so smart a woman as Miss Joyce can understand such a rattlepate as you are. Go get a nice bit of mistletoe for Miss Joyce. The Rowleys, Miss Joyce, have grown their own mistletoe ever since this township began.”

“Why, how do you do it?” asked she, interested at once. “I thought very vaguely that it came of itself in some strange way.”

“We plant ours in an apple tree. Apple trees are the best. You set the seeds under the bark in a good place, and we have the finest mistletoe



around. Rowleys couldn't keep Christmas without mistletoe."

Lonnie and Frank and Ted filled up the sleigh with greens and nuts, and Miss Joyce and the three little boys regretfully departed.

Ted had been feeling as though his suit, which had pleased him abundantly hitherto, needed something to trim it up so that he could look like Frank, for company; and Mrs. Rowley had been meditating the feasibility of offering him something of Frank's. But Frank was wearing his only really good necktie, and it did not seem proper to offer a guest an article of inferior appearance. Both parties were greatly relieved by the little package marked with Ted's name from Miss Joyce.

There was the nicest sort of a necktie and handkerchief, besides a pair of mittens—and a quarter in one of them. Ted was a made boy, and decked out in his necktie, with the corner of his handkerchief, heavily drenched with perfumery by Frank, sticking out of his pocket, he looked quite in place.



It grew to be time for the company to arrive. Mrs. Rowley and Mrs. Cook were in a flutter. Lonnie, arrayed again in her red dress and white apron, mounted guard over the Bennies in their immaculate white dresses. Frank and Ted were at the barn with their elders to help in caring for the teams. Most of the guests were connections of the family, but the doctor, a bachelor, glad of a dinner, was there, and the entire Gates family. Lonnie was so glad to see Miss Abigail Gates, who was to initiate her into a musical paradise, that she could hardly take her eyes from her. There were some half dozen or more children in the company, and combined with the five already at the Rowley homestead, it did seem as though one could hardly turn without running into children. The control of all the small-fry was unanimously handed over to Lonnie, and so nobly did she stand by that task, however much she might have been deficient in the performance of any other, that the children had never a spat and she herself won the highest encomiums.



“Christmas! I should say it was! Why, I never saw the church itself trimmed up like this!”

“Nor I! And the table! Mis’ Rowley, you certainly can boast of your fine linen!”

“I always did take pride in my linen, but it did seem like the talent laid away in a napkin, I so seldom used it.”

“The china now, not a nick in it!”

“Natural enough, for I always have washed it myself, and my mother did the same before me. It was her wedding china and mine.”

“Amanda Rowley had some right pretty china. She had so—gold band and clover leaf. I found most of it was in good order and I packed it all up safe and sound for Frank.”

“That’s more than many would ’a’ done, Mis’ Rowley.”

“Well, I wanted Frank to have his own, and as good as it came into my hands. There was two silver candlesticks, and half a dozen spoons, and one nice set of linen, but that was about all. I’m thinking there might have been more, but



things waste away in ten or eleven years without what you might call personal care."

"That's a true word ; and Frank seems to be so pleasant, too."

"Frank's just as good a boy as ever was, and as good to me as a boy could be, and so kind to Bennie that Bennie puts him before anybody."

Mrs. Rowley dearly loved to talk, but she never had been a woman to air her private affairs.

"Well said ! I'm glad to hear that about Frank. Many a step-mother don't have a right soft time."

"You'll all be ready for your meal, I know, after your cold ride. We'll just bundle up the children and let 'em go to the barn for a bit of sport, and to keep 'em from under foot. Now, you take good care of 'em, Lonnie ; button your cloak all the way down, so's t' keep the dirt off your dress."

And with great hubbub and cheering the little group trotted off to the barn, where all the men seemed to prefer to stay. The guests



in the house gathered themselves, more or less mindful of the company manners due on such an occasion, to look at the photograph albums and the stereoscope.

Mrs. Rowley, thoroughly in her element and bristling with proper pride, placed dish after dish on the long table, and watched the stove and the multitudinous array of cooking utensils.

Frank came in to see if dinner was ready and she told him yes, "Because," as she explained to her friends, "men folks are so queer; after everything is on the table they are just ready to begin looking at the horses' hoofs, and no telling when you'll fetch 'em!"

As it was, however, they and the staple dishes appeared together. The children screamed with open delight at the display, which they felt fully capable, at that hungry moment, of stowing away. Mr. Rowley beamed with satisfaction. This was what he liked—good company, good cheer, regular old-time Christmas doings!



He said aloud to Brother Ben: "Don't Letty beat the nation for a cook! I never had a sight of what she could do before; never a glimpse of it!"

There was scarcely a man at the table but had something to carve, and once the knives and forks got to rattling and the dishes to clinking enjoyment rose to an unaccustomed pitch. Many were the well-deserved compliments heaped on Mrs. Rowley and her cooking, while her very ribbons were in a flutter of pleasure.

Frank found himself looking at his step-mother in a new light. Since openly confessing that he meant to behave better to her he had been more or less shamefaced about everything he said or did in her presence; but this day seemed to wipe it all out. She looked so pretty to him in her holiday attire, and she had prepared such a noble feast, and every one praised her so highly, and she did the honors so exactly as the wife of a Rowley should, that he felt proud she belonged to the family; and



little Bennie was so fat and chunky and sturdy-looking that he felt proud of Bennie, too.

“S’posen a feller lived here all the time,” thought Ted; “my, what a nice place!”

The moment came at last when knives and forks refused to officiate longer, and it became evident that a new course of treatment should be applied. All the dishes that could be considered no longer useful were withdrawn; coffee of the hottest and most fragrant description was resorted to, and then, with all eyes fixed upon her, in came Mrs. Rowley bearing a noble platter, in which reposed an article resembling a football as nearly as anything else, with a sprig of green sticking up in the middle. This was solemnly deposited before Mr. Rowley. He, with gravity befitting the occasion, made a few remarks, and lighting a match applied it. The children shrieked with joy. While still wrapped in its delicate blue flames Mr. Rowley helped out the true old English plum pudding, deluged each dish with a delightfully pervasive sauce, and it was disposed of amid the



unanimous declarations that it was undoubtedly the finest one ever compounded.

Ted could not believe his eyes when he found there was still more to come. Cakes of every description, Charlotte russes, gelatins, creams—all manner of things that Mrs. Rowley assured her guests wouldn't "set heavy in the least," and would make them all feel better.

When the long meal was over the lamps and candles, which had been stuck up everywhere to make sure of sufficient illumination, were already lit, and the guests, satiated and contented, disposed themselves around the rooms to rest and chat.

"Now, I'm just going to set all the cut cakes and light things, and the shrub and light cider over on the side table, and all the nuts and candy, and apples, and pop-corn there, too, so the children and everybody can just help themselves; and now, Joe, you and Brother Ben get out this table."

When the table was removed all the larger children and some of the men went to the barn,



and then, to a tune played by Abigail Gates on the piano, although her music was nearly drowned by the shouts of laughter, in came the huge log with its Christmas decorations; and riding on it as little king of the feast was Bennie Cook, his happy little face aglow with fun; straight through the two rooms, on the long oil-cloth spread for it, went the log, and was with great pushings and haulings put in its place in the yawning hearth, surrounded by the inflammable stuff arranged to make it start; and then with more speeches, the matches were struck, one being applied by nearly every child, and the licking, crackling, snapping, hilarious flame roared up the chimney.

That was a doings, indeed!

The fire was burning long after the last guest, the last sleepy child, had been tucked into the last sleigh and driven away over the crisp snow. Every one, weary with the day's pleasuring, had gone to bed except Mr. Rowley and Brother Ben, who sat by the fireplace sipping a little cider, eating a few nuts, and tasting a little of



the delicious cake, talking over the day's events, their neighbors, their plans for the future, and their families.

"So you don't seem to think badly of Lonnie?"

"Not I," answered Mr. Rowley. "She's been a regular mascot for me. Peace and happiness have come to this house with her, and she's as kind and good and pleasant a child as ever I saw. I think she is true as steel, too."

"We thought well of her at our house, and for nice ways with Bennie I never saw the beat of her. Oh, yes, I was terribly angry with her for charging up that meat at the meat shop and then spending the money; but after thinking it over, more coolly I commenced to believe she didn't really intend stealing anything, because she was meaning to spend it on Bennie. It was bad, but I don't believe she meant anything bad the way I thought she did."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Ben. It's troubled me a lot, I'll admit, and made me uneasy, but I believe you've hit the nail on the



head. It didn't really show she was naturally thieving, or meant to out-and-out steal that time."

"Well, Joe, this has been a great day for all of us. Clear comfort though this is, I guess I'll go to bed, and I'm glad to say I think well of Lonnie, now you've got her."



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE VISIT OF THE TRAMP

“WELL, Ted, my boy,” said Mr. Rowley genially, and intending to be very deep indeed, “I need another boy to help about the chores. As long’s you haven’t anything much to go back to town for, and the street is poor pickings for any lad that can have better for the choosing, I propose that you stay here to help Frank do chores, and go to school, of course, and earn your board and clothes by it. What say you?”

They were out in the barn and alone, and Ted could see, as he supposed, the whole plan at a glance—that Mr. Rowley was sorry for him and was going to offer him a home under the guise of working for it. He was wildly afraid that Mr. Rowley would not press the matter, and yet too afraid lest the good man was imposing on himself to keep quiet.



"I'm not near so strong as Frank, nor so large. No matter how I'd try, I wouldn't be worth my board and clothes at chores, I don't believe."

"Oh, I'm the one to settle that," was the cheerful response. Then, with sudden confidence: "There's more to it than that, too. Frank likes you and I want you to be company for him. His only friends around here seem to be pretty poor stuff, and if he had another boy right here at home he wouldn't hanker after those others."

"Like as not they're a heap better than I am," mumbled Ted, excessively mortified. "But I expect like as not I could be company—anybody could."

"No, anybody couldn't. But we'll call it settled, then. As you're to be right with Frank, I calculate to fix you and do for you same as him; so if it's worse or better than you're expecting you're to consider that it is a part of the contract, and keep quiet about it. Frank!" he shouted at the barn door. After repeating the call, as he always expected to, Frank came from around by the pig pens.



"Frank," said his father, "I've arranged with Ted to stay the rest of the winter, provided nothing turns up to hinder, and help you with the chores."

"Jolly! Oh, my, Ted! won't we have the fun! Oh, I'll show you all those places we were talking about! Come on, let's go astonish Lonnie!"

"I'm glad, too, Ted," said Lonnie, heartily. "Seems like we're bound to live together, after all."

"We'll have the most fun, Ted," said Frank, returning to the burden of his song. "There's the most things to do!"

"Oh," said Lonnie, scornfully, "there isn't, either. Just nothing happens out here!"

She meant what she said at the minute, but before the end of the week she would have made a different remark.

Mrs. Rowley and Bennie had gone to spend the day with a cousin, the plan being formed very hastily at breakfast time. Everybody agreed that Mrs. Rowley must go, and that Lonnie could get up a famous dinner.



After dinner the boys took one of the horses to the blacksmith's, and Mr. Rowley drove some six miles to see an alleged bargain in heifers.

Lonnie had gone out for a moment and had been dallying around looking at things, as was one of her characteristics most aggravating to Mrs. Rowley, but when she neared the house again she had an uncomfortable sensation of some near-by hostile presence. The kitchen looked the same as ever, but it did not feel the same. She looked in the sitting-room, and there at Mr. Rowley's desk, which he generally kept locked, stood a man—evidently a tramp.

The uncomfortable feeling that had oppressed Lonnie vanished.

"I do declare!" she ejaculated. "What you doing there, anyway?"

The man turned around with a growl of fear. Then seeing that his captor was but a very small, red-cheeked, stocky, little curly-haired girl, he swore vehemently, and asked what she wanted interrupting honest people that way.

"You jest quit that now and keep out of Mr.





“WHAT YOU DOIN’ THERE?”  
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Rowley's things! He'll be in any minute—long before you get very far away, and I'll tell about you so you'll be caught in no time."

"I'll choke you if you say another word," said the man, coming toward her threateningly.

"And get choked yourself to pay for it," retorted Lonnie, angrily, standing her ground.

"You scream and I'll kill you just where you are."

"Who's going to scream!" said Lonnie, reflecting that no one could hear her if she did scream.

"You sit right on that chair there and don't you budge," and the man pointed to a chair

Lonnie sat down submissively, for she was anxious to see what the man took.

He turned so that he could see if she made any movement, and then hastily appropriated whatever seemed to be of any value; some papers, about a hundred dollars in money, some notes, and a watch that Mr. Rowley considered too fine to carry and which he kept in that desk. Then, with what seemed to Lonnie



diabolical instinct, he went to a small, flat trunk, covered with cretonne, and used as a seat, and opened it. There was stowed away Mrs. Rowley's chicken money, at that date amounting to thirty-two dollars and forty-three cents. Mrs. Rowley was planning to buy herself a buggy for her own use in the spring. In that trunk also, wrapped in tissue and flannel, reposed Mrs. Rowley's choicest silver and a box of carefully hoarded bits of jewelry. Lonnie held her breath as she saw the man unerringly draw forth every single treasure, and tuck them away in a bag which he drew from inside his vest.

"You—you thief!" sputtered Lonnie.

The man clapped the lid of the trunk shut and seized her roughly by the shoulder.

"Now, I want you to sit right still on that chair for an hour, and not breathe nor nothing—or you'll be shot sudden."

"While you get away!" was the wrathful answer. "You see whether you do or not!"

Oh, she wasn't the least bit afraid of him, and he ground his teeth. He shook her until her



teeth chattered. "I want you to keep still—hear?"

"And I want you to keep still—hear?"

The man hastily whipped off the cretonne cover from the trunk and wrapped it around her head until she was nearly suffocated. Then he wrapped the red-checkered table cloth around the rest of her, carried her to the shed, and was about to leave her there, when he realized how soon she would probably be discovered and describe him; and seeing a large gunny-sack half full of potatoes, he emptied out the potatoes and thrust Lonnie into the sack. Wild for air as she was she still had sense to be thankful that she was feet downwards. The tramp threw her over his shoulder and started on a brisk walk across lots.

As each second of suffocation seemed to Lonnie as long as a year, she judged that she had been for ages in the sack by the time they had crossed two fields. Her thoughts were of a most incoherent and inconsequent nature, but through it all ran a feeling that she was very poorly im-



pressed with the social qualities of thieves. This man was a thief and a liar. There was nothing pleasant about him. She did not wish to pursue the acquaintance. She vaguely regretted the possibility that any one might at any time have felt so about her. She felt stupid. She struggled with all her might to retain consciousness and guess where they might be, and when she could begin to free herself. "Now we have reached Boston," she thought, "and now gone through it. And now San Francisco," making a jump to the next geographical name familiar to her. "And now London; and now Madagascar; and now—" yes, she surely was being put down with a shake she was thankful for, as it revived her.

The tramp had reached the old kiln and was rejoiced by its promise as a resting place. Lonnie and his other possessions made no light weight, and rest he must at any cost. His idea was to tie her up to remain until called for, which he hoped would not be very soon, refresh himself with the contents of his bottle, eat a



little something, and then travel on toward the city under cover of the night and be free to enjoy his plunder. And he had made a very good haul, indeed, for him—a tramp with brain power rather below the average, even of tramps.

He took Lonnie out of the sack and slightly loosened the trunk cover in so doing, so that she could breathe very comfortably, and by a quiet, persistent wriggling even managed to gain a very fair view of her captor. The kiln showed signs of habitation and of abandonment. Even a fire was laid in the rudely-constructed fireplace, and after vaguely resisting the impulse for a time, the tramp lit it and proceeded to make himself comfortable.

“Like to stay here all night,” he muttered. “Not safe, though. Have to git out. Rest me a minute, anyway.”

“Yes, do,” thought Lonnie.

The tramp took out some chicken and sausage and cheese and biscuit.

“Oh, my, what good things!” thought Lonnie, beginning to feel amazingly hungry.



Then the tramp very affectionately drew out from his coat a good-sized black bottle.

"Whisky!" was Lonnie's ecstatic mental comment. "Now, if he'll only stick to that I'm all right!"

A good draught preceded the meal, also accompanied it, and finally he imbibed so copiously at the close that the bottle showed against the fire quite empty.

"No more; all gone; dry; empty," muttered the man, regretfully. "I'll just rest me a minute," and he stretched himself out beside the fire, using the sack for a pillow, and almost before Lonnie could believe it possible he was snoring heavily and sound asleep—a stupid, drunken sleep.

As soon as Lonnie realized the situation she spent very little time in wriggling herself free from her wrappings and then hurriedly knelt down beside him. For the first time in her life she experienced a sensation of loathing for something wrong, bad, wicked. She shuddered a moment and drew back, then admonishing



herself not to be silly she rapidly unbuttoned his vest and drew out the bag. She was not a moment too soon, for the tramp rolled heavily over on his face and her small strength would not have sufficed to have turned him.

Her spirits at once rose when she saw she had already accomplished what would so soon have become impossible, and then she went to the little opening to look out on the world. It was night, but not dark. She knew where the kiln was, about half a mile from the road, and from that point on the road to the Rowleys was nearly a mile. Cross lots the distance was only about half, but Lonnie felt uncertain of the direction and knew that part of the way was hilly and diversified by a piece of woods. She decided that she would go the easiest way, even though she knew it to be farther.

It was very cold and she was only dressed for the house, but her bonds came in good play. Securing the bag as well as she could, she wrapped herself in the red cotton table cloth and started out.



From the top of the little hill back of the kiln she could see a light in the Rider farmhouse. "I could go over there easy as not," thought Lonnie, "quick, too. And Rider and the hired man would turn out and catch him in no time. I won't do it, though. Uncle Joe and Frank would like to catch him themselves, and we'll keep it all in the family. And Riders would be dead certain to make me give up the bag, and they'd just go meddlin' and pryin' through it, and all Uncle Joe's papers and Aunt Lettie's jewelry and all!" She was conscious that any meddling and prying done by the Riders would look very mean to her, and shrugged her shoulders as she thought of it.

"No, sir; from that oak tree over there it's as plain as a pikestaff to get to the road, and then I can go as fast as I've a mind to. Home for me!" and off she started.

Reaching the oak tree was no easy matter; the ground was very stony and uneven and the table cloth was a very poor sort of drapery. Some corner was constantly slipping from her



and tripping her up, and even all her exertions could not prevent her fingers and feet feeling chilled through.

When she reached the oak tree she was obliged to rehabilitate herself. The bag was getting away from her and the table cloth absolutely refused to be controlled. After harnessing herself with quite a little better success she started out again. The way was easy enough now, as from the oak tree to the road there was a cow path. Lonnie stumbled along, cold and uncomfortable, but quite jovial withal over the prospect of the family's pleasure at receiving again their possessions. "What do you suppose they'll think," she thought, "when they find everything open and all the things stolen away and me gone!"



## CHAPTER XVII

### REAL ROWLEY PLUCK

AFTER Mr. Rowley had finished his business he stopped for Mrs. Rowley and Bennie and drove them home. He put them out at the side door and drove on to the barn. Before he had fairly taken up the lines a scream from Mrs. Rowley startled him.

"Joseph! Joseph!" she shrieked, and came to the door grasping Bennie as tightly as possible and giving him spasmodic shakes instead of wringing her hands.

"Well, now, Letty, what is it?" inquired Mr. Rowley, anxiously and hastily stepping upon the porch.

"Joseph!" was Mrs. Rowley's only answer.

Mr. Rowley started to go in the door, but Mrs. Rowley disengaged a hand from Bennie and seized the pocket of Mr. Rowley's coat.

"Joseph, don't! You'll be murdered!"



This seemed to be an added incentive to entrance, and Mr. Rowley went in, followed by his weeping wife. He was sufficiently aghast when he looked around. His beloved desk open and the contents spread over the floor. His wife's dearly treasured little trunk open and the things scattered right and left. He looked around in bewilderment, and noticed that the table cover was gone. In the shed potatoes strewed the floor.

The boys had returned from the blacksmith's some time previously, but had remained in the barn, working at a trap. They heard Mrs. Rowley's scream and hurried to the house. As they entered the door the same scene of confusion met their eyes.

"Burglar!" exclaimed Ted.

"Thieves!" groaned Mrs. Rowley, sitting, very gingerly, on the edge of a rocking-chair, and clasping the struggling Bennie.

"Tramps!" gloomily hazarded Mr. Rowley.

"Some of Lonnie's doings!" said Frank, suspiciously.



Sure enough, where was Lonnie.

"Oh, that joking Lonnie!" exclaimed Mrs. Rowley, seizing at once on something familiar and less gruesome; "oh, my good things!"

She looked in the trunk and burst out weeping afresh. Her silver gone. Her jewelry gone. Yes, even her chicken-money gone!

"Oh! oh! oh!" she cried, "what can Lonnie mean. Nobody else could have known just where I kept my things!"

"Come, come, Letty, no use accusing Lonnie first thing. That was just Frank's nonsense. She wouldn't touch the things!"

"Oh, she's always touching things!—and now my things are gone!" and she wept afresh, assisted, this time, by Bennie, who had previously remained imperturbable.

"Why, Lonnie wouldn't go off with them," said Ted, indignantly, conscious in his philosophical way of the very insecure hold he and Lonnie had in this family, and recognizing that any suspicion there could be cast on Lonnie might just as well be



turned on himself if circumstances seemed to favor it.

“Of course not!” said Mr. Rowley. “Anybody would think we were crazy!”

He examined his desk, muttering dejectedly as he did so. So much hard cash gone; three notes gone, and the loss of one, at least, liable to be a very serious matter; other papers gone. Then he turned his attention to his wife's misfortunes. Her hard-earned chicken-money gone absolutely; her treasured silver and jewelry.

“Where is Lonnie, anyway?” asked Frank.

“If she was here all alone when somebody came to steal,” said Ted, “it's like enough she'd run somewhere for help. I would. She'd go to Gates', maybe.”

“That's so, Ted, my boy,” said Mr. Rowley; “of course she would! You boys go on over and see. However do you suppose those potatoes came on the floor and what became of the table cloth? Well—this is getting to be a dangerous neighborhood for certain.”

“Come on, Frank, let's go,” urged Ted, thank-



ful from the bottom of his heart that he had been with Frank all day and that nobody could be thinking he was to blame for the afternoon's misfortunes.

As they started on a dog trot across the fields Frank began.

"I don't believe Lonnie's over here at Gates'."

"Well, what do you believe?" rather testily.

"I think she's hiding somewhere."

"What on earth makes you think Lonnie would take money out of Uncle Joe's desk?"

"Why, I think Lonnie would do pretty near anything."

"But why should you think she would do that? What good would it do her to have those things?"

"Oh, I don't mean she stole 'em!" ejaculated Frank, horrified at the idea. "I meant I thought it was a trick she played—a joke—to stir everything up, so she could see mother fuss and father stir around like a hen on a hot griddle."

"Oh!" Ted felt a weight lifted from him. It wasn't so bad to think that, and it was like



Lonnie, after all. Perhaps she was just that foolish.

When they reached the Gates' side door, panting, and their knock was answered, they burst out simultaneously :

“Is Lonnie here?”

“Lonnie? Why, no. Lonnie hasn't been here. Mother, has Lonnie been here?”

“Bless you, no! Certainly not! Come right in, boys; don't stay out there in the cold; come in!” as they stood rather sheepishly inside the kitchen door; “come in and have a hot doughnut!” She scented a pleasing mystery and was bent on unraveling it.

“Abigail! Oh, Abigail, come here! You didn't see Lonnie, did you?”

“No, indeed; what's the matter with Lonnie?”

“There, now you have swallowed that doughnut, speak up like a little man and tell us what's the matter.”

“Why, we were all away from home this afternoon, except Lonnie, and when we got back,



father and mother and all of us, we found father's desk broken open and money gone and things, and mother's things gone, and we can't find Lonnie, and we thought maybe she had come over here for help."

"No; she hasn't been here."

"Did you look in the barn?" said Abigail. "Likely she got scared and hid there quick as she saw the villain. I would run to the barn quick as ever I saw one."

The boys looked at each other. If Lonnie had been hiding in the barn from fear, she would have joined them quickly enough while they were working over their trap.

"More likely the villain slew her and you will find her gory body," suggested the other daughter, who was possessed of a fertile, but exceedingly morbid imagination.

Frank gave a shudder, but Ted was far from being unaccustomed to suggestions of violence.

"Perhaps your pa would like Mr. Gates to come over with the man and help hunt."

"No, I guess not," said Frank, hastily. "He



can come over and let Mr. Gates know if he means to. We must be going before it's all the way dark."

"Yes, to be sure. If thieves and tramps are abroad you're liable to be nabbed on the way home," said the younger daughter, but Abigail gave them each two fat, hot doughnuts and they sallied forth again. It was growing dark, and they whistled vigorously as they went along.

"Sho, Ted! There, what's that back of that tree?" and with one accord they broke into a quick run.

"It's that old billy goat," panted Ted, who had looked again. "Don't let's run any more. I'm tired."

"Well, there's our light. We'll be there pretty quick, now. Where do you suppose Lonnie is?"

"P'raps she tried to hide somewhere and shut herself in and can't get out."

"Or went to sleep."

"Maybe."



"Oh, there! Now that was somebody back of our haystack."

"It is, sure!"

And they ran like mad, fairly tumbling on their side steps and throwing themselves inside the door.

Mrs. Rowley gave a slight scream.

"What is the matter with you boys?"

"Oh, we saw the burglar out here!"

"The thief?"

"The tramp?"

"What did he say?"

"Why—why. Why, he didn't say anything. We ran!"

"Yes, I can see you ran. Did you hear anything of Lonnie?"

"No; she hadn't been at Gates'."

"Jane Gates said the burglar had most likely killed her and we would find her gory body."

"My, my, my!" groaned Mrs. Rowley.  
"Joseph, do you think so?"

"No, of course not!" Then, with sudden de-



termination, "No more crying over spilt milk here! I'm going to shut up my things and quit the whole business, except Lonnie."

"Oh, my things!" sobbed his wife.

"Oh, we'll get them, don't worry! I meant I wasn't going to fret, I was going to do. I'll think up some plan and go ahead on it, but it's late and we must eat first; come, boys, fly around and straighten up here. It's well nigh as cold as a barn and Bennie freezing. Hustle in some wood, there! Come, Letty, cheer up! You shall have all your things to-morrow, I am sure of it. Rowleys aren't the men, father nor son, to be robbed by any one that chooses. Come, now, hustle, boys! rattle around!"

The boys were already at work at the stove, and by the time Mr. Rowley had shut up his desk and got the trunk out of sight and consoled Bennie, Mrs. Rowley had revived sufficiently to spread the cloth and get ready a supper.

"What you going to do about it, father?" asked Frank while they ate.

"I am going to look all around the place for



Lonnie, then I am going to stir up Gates and all the neighbors to hunt for her; and notify the sheriff, and wake things up generally."

"Oh, Joseph!" groaned his wife, her fears bursting forth afresh, "you'll be killed before the night's out!"

"Likely!"

"Well, father, I can go, can't I?"

"No, sir! No boys allowed this trip!"

"My beautiful brooch that my great-grandmother wore!" and Mrs. Rowley was again all but in tears.

"And your chicken-money!" said Ted, adding fuel to the flame.

"I've lost over a hundred myself," said Mr. Rowley.

A scuffling noise was heard around the house, then a kicking on the steps, and a stamping and dragging on the porch.

Every one at the table started and looked askance. Mr. Rowley half rose from his chair, with the carving-knife as a weapon. Mrs. Rowley's eyes were opened wide. Ted and



Frank were staring, as though hypnotized, at Mr. Rowley. Then the door opened, and as Mr. Rowley recovered the power of motion and started forward, in came Lonnie, red-cheeked and panting.

"Didn't suppose I'd be here in time for supper! My, but I'm hungry! Here's your things, Uncle Joe!"

"Lonnie!" ejaculated Mr. Rowley; "how did you get here?"

"Walked. Better ask how I got away from here!"

"Is my brooch in there, Lonnie?" pleaded Mrs. Rowley.

"Guess it is!"

"Then I forgive you!" she murmured, for her mind had at once reverted to the idea that Lonnie was to blame for the whole proceeding.

"Forgive me for what!" sputtered Lonnie.

"Sit down, Lonnie, sit down. You are clean tired out. Letty, give her some tea, or something. Wherever did you get that table cloth to go out in?"



The reaction had set in, and Frank and Ted were in fits of laughter at her efforts to disentangle herself from her toga.

She freed one hand, and quick as lightning gave each of the boys a good slap on the cheek. "Guess you'd been glad to wear a table cloth, cold night like this, if you hadn't anything else! Uncle Joe, I jes' wish you'd strap 'em both!"

Mr. Rowley had managed to untwine her, and finding that she really was trembling with cold and exhaustion, he seated her in his favorite arm-chair by the stove and chafed her hands, and plied her with hot tea until she felt better. The boys stood by eyeing her curiously, while Mrs. Rowley kept looking at the bag, though not daring to touch it.

"Were you the tramp, Lonnie?" asked Frank.

"Uncle Joe, let me get up and hit him, if you won't!" was the exasperated answer.

"Now, Lonnie, you just sit quiet, and when you feel rested and warm, tell us about it," said Mr. Rowley, soothingly.

"I can tell now just as well."



“All right,” chimed in Frank, eagerly.  
“What were you wearing that table cloth for?”

“To keep me warm!”

“Well—but—your coat—?”

“What were those potatoes on the floor for?”  
asked Ted.

“Tramp emptied them out of the sack.”

“Tramp!” cried everybody.

Now that Lonnie and the things were back  
the tramp seemed a mere chimera.

“Yes; a thief!”

“What did he empty the potatoes out for?”  
pursued Ted.

“So as to have the sack.”

“What did he do with the sack?”

“Put me in it.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the audience.

“Why didn’t you yell?” went on Ted, the  
others seeming to defer to his skill in question-  
ing by common consent.

“He wrapped me up in the table cloth and  
trunk cover, so I couldn’t.”

“Oh, mercy, mercy!” shrieked Mrs. Rowley.



“And you’ll catch him, won’t you, Uncle Joe? He is over to the old kiln yet, but when he wakes up and finds I’m gone, he’ll get out as quick as ever he can.”

And Lonnie told the particulars of her abduction and subsequent escape.

“Yes, indeed,” chuckled Mr. Rowley. “He will be safe with the sheriff before he wakes up.”

“I’ve been a long time a-coming,” said Lonnie, doubtfully.

“I’m not even going to wait to look at the stuff; yes, I’ll have to, though, catch a sight of it;” and while the others, Lonnie excepted, crowded around him, though with the expression of expecting a wild animal to leap out at them, Mr. Rowley opened the bag and hastily extracted Mrs. Rowley’s silver and some of the more cumbrous articles, and some of his own papers.

“There!” he exclaimed, “I’ve got to hurry! I’ve seen ’em and that’s enough; get me my lantern, Frank! I’ll get the gun!”

“Oh, Joseph!” moaned Mrs. Rowley.



“Now, Letty,” said Mr. Rowley, reproachfully, “I thought when you got your things back you would be as chipper as a bird. Good-by all. No, I’m not going to kiss anybody ; I’ll do that when I come back. Not a bit of danger in the world ; not the least bit. Good-by all. Now, boys, take good care of your mother.”

Lonnie gave Ted a poke in the ribs, but he refused to smile.

Mr. Rowley slammed the door mightily after him and stamped down the porch steps, while the little group by the stove looked at each other with more or less apprehension.

“I’m hungry ; everybody has had supper but me !” and Lonnie moved up to the table, and with the first mouthful her tongue seemed to become lubricated, and she entered on a vivid description of the tramp’s doings in the kiln, while the boys listened, open-mouthed.

The humor of the description soothed Mrs. Rowley to such a degree that she was able to take the clothes from the sleeping Bennie, put on his nightgown and lay him in bed. Then they all



joined in the process of clearing up, actuated by a desire to keep together.

After that task had been stretched out to the last limit, they sat around the stove again, talking with longer and longer pauses and a more strongly marked tendency each moment to start at every sound. And each one was manifestly listening for something to break the outside stillness. Then it came. The clip-clap of the horse's feet, his neighing, snuffing of the air and the loud, cheerful "whoa!" from Mr. Rowley, which sent a thrill of joyous relief through each one of the waiting group.

In he came, and was greeted with a perfect volley of questions.

"Got him? Of course we did; landed him high and dry! Too drunk to know where he is yet, I'll be bound. You are a trump, Lonnie. If it hadn't been for you he would have been in Boston, and then good-by Jack—we never would have got him! I can tell you, Letty, you may thank Lonnie that you still have your brooch and your silver and your chicken-money!



Sound asleep there by the fire, and it's lucky for him we got there, he would have been burned alive if we hadn't! Why, his coat sleeve was afire already! I was thankful he was saved an end like that. Your kiln would have been haunted forever, Frank—don't know but it is now. Well, we got him, and I say Lonnie's the girl with pluck, real, downright Rowley pluck! And I'm obliged to you, Lonnie, this night, I am!"

Mr. Rowley's beaming, genial smile warmed Lonnie through and through. There seemed to be an element of self-respect in the feeling that was like nothing she had ever consciously experienced before, and she smiled cordially back.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### A CALL ON THE MATRON

THE affair with the tramp induced Mr. Rowley, as he meditated on his recovered notes and undiminished cash in hand, to plan something that might show his appreciation to Lonnie. But study as he would he could think of no feasible scheme. As for Mrs. Rowley, she said she felt more like putting up with Lonnie's exasperating idiosyncrasies in regard to her household duties than before, and, for her part, teaching her good, sensible, thrifty ways was plenty enough. And Mr. Rowley thought so, too. Still he wished there was something he could do that would seem a little extra in her behalf.

Lonnie was out in the barn looking for eggs, when it occurred to Mr. Rowley to ask her if there was anything she particularly wanted.



“If there was just one sort of small thing you could have or do, kind of extra-like, Lonnie, what would it be?” he inquired, in the style which he always so much admired in himself for its diplomacy.

And, to Lonnie’s surprise, she knew. She really could not have told that she had thought very much about it, or regretted it much, or planned anything about it, but, all of a sudden, the idea seemed to come into her mind.

She started to speak and then stopped, reddening uncomfortably.

Mr. Rowley stopped his work and looked at her curiously. He had not expected much of an answer.

“Why don’t you speak, Lonnie?”

Lonnie picked an egg out of her apron and examined it minutely.

“Go on, Lonnie.”

“Oh, you see, Uncle Joe, while I was at that Home I did an awful thing. I—I—well, I just broke a little box that belonged to the matron, and it made her feel bad, and I really was sorry



I broke that box, and if you could think of some work to give me to do that you were going to pay somebody for, maybe you could pay me enough to get her a new box. P'raps I could paint the barn or get up your hay next summer, or—or—or—clean the cistern—or—”

But Mr. Rowley was laughing.

“There, I knew you'd laugh, or something,” and Lonnie looked quite defiant.

“Sho—pshaw, never mind! we'll think of something. That's right. Always pay back what you owe, and you owe the matron a new box, surely. You were a good girl to tell me.”

Mr. Rowley decided that he would drive up to Boston on the very next Saturday if the roads were firm and the day fair, and that he would not take the boys, but would take Lonnie instead. Saturday had to be the day chosen, as Lonnie was now going to school with the boys. The first few days that she went she behaved moderately well and had become what one of the girls called “the girl in the school.” The next stage was one in which elation over



her previous success as a star carried her to wild extremes. To be impudent, or "smart," to draw a laugh, or have a chaffer with some of the large boys, seemed to be her wildest ambition. To say "don't know" and appear careless was her *rôle* to Mr. Long, and he was sorry for the day Lonnie had crossed his path. Frank and Ted, however, after the first day or so of this freak became exceedingly restless under it. They remonstrated, but to no purpose.

"You're a perfect born idiot, Lonnie," growled Ted to her privately one day. "You think you're smart, but you're just turning everybody against you, and if Uncle Joe hears of it something will happen, sure! He can't stand that sort of thing, and I know you don't know anything. Why don't you learn? You're an awful goose, I tell you!"

Lonnie was secretly enraged and mortified, but she tossed her head and said Ted was "nobody," and behaved worse than ever next day.

"Lonnie," said Frank fiercely to her, "if you don't quit acting so I'll tell father and we'll see



about it! I'm ashamed to have you come from our house!"

And that from Frank!

"Oh, you!" flamed Lonnie; "you're a pretty one to talk, good as you've always acted in school!"

However, the philosophical Ted was used to Lonnie and knew her like a book.

"I can fix her, Frank," he said, "if you'll join in, and you won't have to tell your father. It would be pretty hard on her to do that. I don't think she would tell on you for anything."

Frank knew she wouldn't also, but he was bitterly incensed at the way she behaved.

"What can we do?" he asked.

"Oh, just work it right after school, and maybe get Mr. Long to help a little, and every time she says 'don't know,' or acts flat, or chaffs, or sasses, get the boys to hiss or yah or something, so she'll know they're laughing at her and not because she is amusing."

Frank caught up the plan with gusto and



that night they sounded Mr. Long and secured a tacit assurance that he would let anything of the kind pass unnoticed for a day or two until they could see if it had any effect. The next morning he called the little class forward and wrote on the board: "I see a rat."

"Lonnie," he said, "read that."

"Shoot that hat!" was the prompt reply.

"Hiss-ss-ss" went around the room so unmistakably that Lonnie jumped.

Mr. Long appeared not to have noticed it.

"I did not understand, Lonnie. Read it again, please, and more slowly."

"I can't see it," uncertainly.

"Hiss-ss-ss" again, while Lonnie's eyes dilated.

"I think you can see it, but you may come forward to the board, take the pointer, and read each word distinctly as you point to it."

Lonnie gathered herself together for a final effort, shook her hair, stepped nimbly forward, took the pointer and sang out, "I see a red head!"



There was a slight titter, as Mr. Long's hair was popularly termed red, but it was drowned by a violent hissing.

"You are excessively stupid, Lonnie," said Mr. Long, "not to be able to read any better than that. You may wear the fool's cap for fifteen minutes."

Lonnie, consumed with vexation at the distinct failure of her great stroke, marched stubbornly to the stool, and sat there grimacing, expecting to raise sympathetic snickers, but was promptly met by hisses; and then for fifteen minutes she was the object of contumely from all parts of the room—even paper wads were thrown at her—while the usually strict teacher seemed to notice nothing amiss; derisive faces were made at her and she heard deadly whispers of "smarty," "face-maker," "sass-box." She could have burst into tears readily enough, but she stiffened her body and her face, and sat there so rigid and so unseeingly staring that it aroused a desperate pity for her in Mr. Long's heart and also in Frank's. Ted knew so well



what she could stand when put to it, and was also so afraid that she would, unless prevented, behave badly enough to be blamed by Mr. Rowley, that he was only anxious lest the lesson should not cut deep enough.

“Now, Lonnie,” said Mr. Long, when the fifteen minutes were up, “you may put on your things and go outside. Evidently this school is not the place for you in your present frame of mind. Listen. If you do not wish to be taught, and do not wish to behave properly in school, you may go home now. If you think you are able to learn and wish to keep the school rules, you may stay outside until I see fit to give you another chance.”

The room was still while Mr. Long was speaking, and then every one clapped and tramped, while Lonnie, with flaming cheeks, but head well up, walked out.

Oh, she did not know what to do! Go home she wouldn't, for she just loved to go to school; the little excitements of school life, the boys and girls, the pleasure of it all, she could not give



up! And to have them all treat her that way, it was shameful! Why, she had thought they would all stand by her and laugh with her, no matter what she did. Well, she wasn't going home at any rate. She would go back when she got a chance, and she would just show that man whether she could learn or not! She would go right along and get into Ted's class, and Frank's, and beat both! She wouldn't act as though she remembered a thing about what any of them did.

Finally Mr. Long became nervous on the subject, and imagined Lonnie going home and telling a terrible tale of the morning's doings, or going away somewhere else, or catching cold outdoors, and other shocking things, and sent a girl to call her in.

"Now, everybody remember no notice whatever is to be taken of Lonnie if she comes in," he said sharply, to Frank's relief.

Lonnie came, and, in spite of Mr. Long's warning, every one managed to get a good look at her. She looked as fresh and happy and



nice as a little rose. She took her seat with an obedient, interested air. When the class was called next, though Mr. Long dreaded the ordeal and every pupil in the school was alert for new and shocking developments, every question put to Lonnie was answered with a promptness and accuracy that left nothing to be desired. When recess came she would have been picked out at once as the nicest-mannered little damsel on the playground.

The boys carried home golden reports of her achievements, passing over the earlier experience, and Mr. Rowley praised her unstintingly, and from that time on she made a most unimpeachable record, and her advance was surprising.

Mr. Rowley decided, consequently, that when he took Lonnie to Boston it must be on a Saturday, and on a Saturday it was that he drove her in a wagon loaded with some well-covered cabbages to the enchanted city. Lonnie, well wrapped up and brimming over with excitement, was perched up beside him on the high



seat; and the thought that Mrs. Rowley looked with doubt on the proceeding and that both the boys envied her her good fortune rather increased her delight than otherwise.

“What sort of a box was Miss Harding’s?”

“Miss who’s?”

“Miss Harding’s—the matron’s.”

“Oh, is that her name! I thought it was just matron!”

“What did you call her?”

“Aunt Jane; every one called her Aunt Jane.”

“That’s funny. How did you come to break the box?”

“Oh, trying to open it. Whose farm’s that?”

“Nobody owns it that you know; but that one over there where the red barn is, is the Harding farm. A cousin of the matron’s owns it now.”

“Do you know her?”

“Land, yes! I used to think she was going to be my sister-in-law. Fifteen years ago, before my brother John went rovin’ away out



West, he used to keep company with Jane Harding, and a mighty fine girl she was, too! I'm bound to think there was some misunderstanding between them, the way he went off and the way she did afterwards; but I don't know."

Mr. Rowley seemed to have forgotten his interlocutor; then he roused up: "Well, well! What kind of a box do you say it was?"

"Oh, it was a funny, longish box, without any way you could see to open it, and made of little bits of pieces of wood that smelled good."

"Do tell! Why, I used to know jes' such a box. I verily believe that must be a box we had, or John had, and that John gave to Jane Harding. I do verily believe it. No use your trying to buy a box like that. You just couldn't do it. That came from England ever so long ago, and was brought there from China or some foreign place, for in England a good many of the Rowleys were seafaring men. I always thought John had a roving, seafaring streak in him, maybe. But you can't buy any such box as that."



“What’ll I do then?” said Lonnie, considerably disappointed at the prospect of having to give up a shopping expedition.

“Better get her something else more trifling, and go say you’re sorry you did such a thing.”

That wasn’t so pleasant, but then anything made a variety.

She finally bought an account book and pencil, and Mr. Rowley took her to the door and waited in the wagon for her. “I guess I won’t go in this time, Lonnie,” he said. “Next time I come up I’ll bring Miss Jane some good butter and then I’ll see her.”

Mary came to the door.

“Well, Lonnie!” she ejaculated, her face lighting with pleasure. “You’re not sent back, are you?”

“No, ’course not,” answered Lonnie, laughing. “I’ve come to bring a present to the matron. I’d a brought one to you and Kate if I’d thought about it.”

“Pity you didn’t think about it, then,” was the rejoinder. “Kate nor I don’t have such a



terrible sight of presents. Here, Aunt Jane will see you now, I guess." She knocked at the door and, after a summons from within, announced mischievously, "Aunt Jane, here's Lonnie back again!"

"Mercy, Mary! I haven't had any word!"

"Just making a call," supplemented Mary, while the matron's face cleared somewhat.

"Come in, Lonnie; how do you do?"

"Oh, I'm well. I just stopped a minute to give you a present," and Lonnie importantly handed over her package.

"Why, that's kind of you. Where are you now? I don't believe I ever knew certainly where the Board did send you, come to think of it."

"I'm at Mr. Rowley's—Mr. Joseph Rowley's."

The matron started slightly. "Oh, yes; there was talk of it, but I didn't know the Board decided finally to send you. How are they all?"

"They're all well."

"Who all are in the family?" asked Miss Harding, trying to conceal her interest.



“Uncle Joe and Aunt Letty, and Frank and Bennie, and Ted and me. Say, I’m sorry I was so bad, but I’m behaving splendid now. Good-by,” and Lonnie beat a somewhat hasty retreat.

But Lonnie had acquired a fictitious value in the eyes of the matron by reason of her residing with the Rowleys; unwonted stirrings were in her heart, and she did not wish to wholly lose the chance of any possible information on a certain point.

“Come again, Lonnie, I’ll be glad to see you; and tell Mr. Rowley I would be real glad to see him, too. Perhaps he doesn’t know it, but I would. Don’t forget to tell him.”

“Oh, she would, would she?” said Mr. Rowley, thoughtfully, when Lonnie delivered her message. “I would ’a’ gone in if I’d known it. I’ll take her some things next time I come in, and stop a bit to chat. G’up, Peg!”



## CHAPTER XIX

### A TELEGRAM

“WHAT can be the matter with father, Ted?”

Frank gazed anxiously at his father's back as Mr. Rowley walked slowly up the path from the barn to the house. He had driven off to town early in the morning and, after an unusual absence, had returned so manifestly disturbed and unconscious of what he was doing that the boys, doing chores out in the barn and eager to talk with him about a scheme of their own, were dumfounded.

“He does act queer for a fact,” assented Ted. “Perhaps he's got a chance to sell stock or something.”

It was the latter part of June. If Ted had enjoyed the farm through the cold weather, his deep, still delight in the spring beauty of the Rowley place and the country round about was



almost inexpressible. As for Frank, he knew nothing else, and apart from the spring thrills that seized him, just about as they did the little calves in the barnyard, he was not conscious of any particular glorying in sky or field or wooded slope. As for Lonnie, the spring was in her blood, too, but the country was a poor change at best for the city. Give her a street—a good brick street with people on it—the more the better. But she was possessed of a spirit of adaptability that made her seize on and make the most of every gay thing that came in her way, country or city.

When Mr. Rowley entered the house his manner speedily impressed itself on Mrs. Rowley.

“For the land sakes, Lonnie, what do you suppose is ailin’ Uncle Joe!” she exclaimed to Lonnie out in the shed-room, where she and Lonnie were pasting labels on jelly tumblers. “I couldn’t get a whole word out of him, and I don’t half believe he knows he’s home. You go see if you can rouse him; there’s a good girl!”



Lonnie picked up a tumbler of currant jelly, clear as a jewel and seemingly filled with light itself, and hurried into the sitting-room.

“Look, Uncle Joe, how’s that? Want a taste? Here—here’s a spoon—de-li-ci-ous!”

She got him to take a taste and nearly half the tumbler immediately followed.

“There! how’s that? Good?”

“Splendid! Can’t beat Letty making jelly,” was the appreciative answer which brought a glow to Mrs. Rowley’s cheeks.

“Well, Joe,” she said, “I’m glad to see you waked up again. Whatever’s the matter with you?”

“Matter enough,” was the solemn reply. “Letty, sit down; I don’t know when I’ve been more upset.”

The boys had come up to the house and edged themselves into the room in an awed manner in time to hear the last words, and they straightway removed their hats in deference to so solemn an occasion, and seated themselves stiffly on the extreme edge of the same chair



for the sake of the moral support derived from propinquity.

Lonnie, radiant with the expectation of any sort of an excitement, seated herself on a stool squarely in front of Mr. Rowley that she might lose nothing, and Mrs. Rowley, giving occasional dabs at stray flies with her apron, rocked uneasily in the large rocking-chair. Bennie came sidling in, his face smeared with jelly, and with a spoon clutched in one fat hand.

"Now, Joseph, do go on," urged his wife. "I'm getting all wrought up!"

Mr. Rowley took a letter from his inside pocket.

"I may as well read it to you. You will know all I know."

Then in slow, distinct tones, he read:

"MR. JOSEPH ROWLEY,

"DEAR SIR:—For a year Mr. John Rowley has been boarding with us. He has been sick two months and over, and is, at present, very ill. He asked me to write to you when



he has gone, but he talks so about you and his folks and home, when he is out of his head, that I thought I would take the responsibility of letting you know while he is yet living. The doctor has given him up, but you could, in all probability, reach here before his death if you are so inclined.

Respectfully,

“JOHN G. HART.”

A low breath of astonishment went around the circle.

“Where is he?” asked Lonnie, as usual, the first one to speak.

“That’s so, where is he?” echoed Mrs. Rowley.

“Kansas City, Missouri.”

“Oh, Joe; you’d never go way out there!” said his wife.

“Oh, father, take me, do!” put in Frank.

But Mr. Rowley could not as yet adjust himself to the present. He had gone back to his boyhood since the letter came. His little brother, John, who for a time followed him



like a shadow, caught bait for him, cleaned his gun, did chores, fagged for him generally. The laughing one of the family, of a more slender build, of a more mobile expression, the active, restless one. "Not much of a Rowley," as the boys' father used to say. Farm work did not suit him. Then he seemed about to settle down, and they all thought he would marry Jane Harding, and his father gave him his "share," which he was supposed to be about to put into a small piece of land and a house. Then he went away very suddenly with not much leave-taking, and though he wrote twice to his father soon after going, when his father died, a year later, a short letter to Joe had been the last heard from him. For nearly sixteen years they had heard nothing of him.

"How can you go, Uncle Joe?" said Lonnie.

"You were telling yesterday you were so pushed to get the farm work along right, so as to do well with it, that you were clean daft."

Mr. Rowley had not thought of that yet. Go he must, and go he should, and go he would,



and go at once into the bargain ; but he thought despairingly of his farm.

“ Frank and I could take care of everything and see to everything just exactly the way you tell us, Uncle Joe,” said Ted, thoughtfully.

Frank hastily swallowed his wild wish to accompany his father, and sturdily repeated Ted’s remark.

“ Well, a man never had better boys than you two,” said Mr. Rowley in a comforted tone as he turned toward the boys. His eyes rested with fatherly pride on Frank, a Rowley every inch of him—very large for his age, deep-chested and heavily built boy though he was, with the square jaw and steady eyes of one to be absolutely relied upon.

Ted had grown tall, but he was light and slender and with a gravity and quietness of demeanor that made him seem older than the little fellow he was.

“ We can do it—don’t you fear !”

“ Oh, Joe !” moaned Mrs. Rowley, “ must you go ? I suppose you must !”



Lonnie had been rapidly taking in the whole situation ; action was particularly in her line.

“ If he’s dying,” she said practically, “ you’ll have to hurry.”

Traveling seemed to all of them so momentous that they had not really considered the probability of his departure at any very near moment. A week or so seemed little enough time to take for the consideration of such a step.

“ You ought to go to-night, Uncle Joe,” persisted Lonnie.

“ Lonnie !” exclaimed the scandalized Mrs. Rowley.

“ What’s the use of his going at all if he don’t go quick !” retorted Lonnie.

To really see a point meant decision for Mr. Rowley. He rose without a word, looked at his watch and walked into the bed-room.

Mrs. Rowley began to weep.

“ Sh ! Aunt Letty,” put in Lonnie, more and more entering into the scene. “ You better go this minute and see what he’s doing. He won’t get any handkerchiefs, nor neckties, nor socks,



nor nothing, if you don't hurry ; and he'll want a heap of lunch. You best hurry !”

The word lunch and the thought of the clean handkerchiefs proved to be sufficiently invigorating. Mrs. Rowley bustled after her husband, while Lonnie turned to the boys. “My ! don't you wish we could go to the train ?”

“We can,” said Frank. “You can't.”

“I can, too, if you're going,” pouted Lonnie.

“We have to go to bring back the team.”

“Uncle Joe'll let me go, you see ! See here,” brightening, “he'll be gone soon, and you won't know what to do about that trade, nor about the buckwheat, nor about that hog sale, nor about those heifers. You ought to find out before he goes !”

“That's so, Lonnie,” said Ted. “I say, Frank, she better ride in with us, and then we can all three think what to ask about.”

Mr. Rowley had made up his mind to take the six o'clock train in to Boston and be ready for a midnight train out.

His few preparations were rapidly made.



While his wife was fixing the indispensable lunch he called Frank into the bed-room and shut the door.

“Frank, my boy,” he said, solemnly placing his hands on the boy’s shoulders, while Frank looked at him with little creeping chills going up and down his back, “if anything should happen to me, remember you are a Rowley. Remember you are to stand by the place and your mother and Bennie. Remember Bennie is your particular charge. Remember I promised Lonnie a home here. And let Ted stay till he can make his own way, if he is worthy of it. Oh, Frank, my boy!” and he hastily left the room, while Frank tried to master an unruly lump in his throat.

The boys harnessed; Lonnie arrayed herself to go and kept well out of the way until it was time to start. She knew Mrs. Rowley would protest, and she hoped the leave-taking would prevent anything very decided being said. The boys abetted her, and it was not until Mr. Rowley had over and over again said good-by to his



wife and Bennie that Lonnie's presence in the wagon was realized. The boys whipped up in a lively way and off they went.

A fire of questions as to this and that occupied the drive, and at the station they still had some time to wait. Mr. Rowley talked with his friend, the ticket agent, about his trip and ways and means. Lonnie never missed a word of it, and by the time the train came every detail made clear by the painstaking agent was plain in her mind.

"Here she comes, father!" cried Frank, as the train came around the curve. "Here's your bag!"

"Here's your lunch-box, Uncle Joe," put in Ted.

"And here's your umbrella. I just know you'll forget that umbrella before you get there!"

"Dear me, Lonnie," sighed Mr. Rowley, "I'm thinking I will! I wish you were going with me, just to take care of that one thing."

A flash of sudden desire lit up Lonnie's face.



Oh, couldn't she go, she thought; half a dozen rapid plans darted through her head, plans of jumping on at the last moment and showing herself to Mr. Rowley when it should be too late to return her.

But nothing, she was forced to acknowledge, seemed to be feasible, and with a mighty sigh she merely said:

"If you don't get back pretty quick, Uncle Joe, I'm going to go after you!"

"I'll warrant you're equal to it!" he said, kindly.

"Good-by, Ted! Good-by, Lonnie. Keep up Aunt Letty's courage and don't let her worry! Frank — Frank — Frank, my boy, remember you're the man of the house; and remember, Frank, you're a Rowley."

The train had stopped—a very ordinary city train, such as Mr. Rowley had traveled to Boston on all his life; such as Frank and Ted and Lonnie had always been used to seeing there or at the Boston stations—but how different it looked. The people, the conductor, the brake-



men, even the familiar baggage-master on the platform, seemed enveloped in a mysterious, suggestive atmosphere.

More good-bys, then Mr. Rowley disappeared inside the car to appear again at an open window on the station side, while the children ran along to the end of the platform, waving their hands and shouting unintelligible advice.

“Well, he’s gone!” said Frank, breathlessly, when they stopped, “gone! and it’s all been so sudden I don’t know how to believe it!”

Ted shrugged his shoulders. He was much more used to sudden changes and general family upheavals than Frank could even imagine. Since his mother’s death in the hospital, not long after she was taken there, he had known comparative quiet. He had loved his mother, for she had always seemed to feel that he was of peculiar clay, and had always made things as easy for him as was possible under the circumstances. But shocked as he was by her accident and death, the being free from the noise and turmoil of their usual domestic existence had



been a daily, unspeakable relief to him. And to be there in the country with Frank and Mr. Rowley and Mrs. Rowley and Bennie and Lonnie, going to school, looking and acting like other boys, enjoying to the utmost the quiet and cordiality and good feeling of the farm-house and all the full round of country doings, was almost ideal happiness to him. He was fond of Lonnie, very fond of her, but he always had a shamed feeling that she could, and would if she felt like it, tell things, troublesome things, about their past life in Boston. Lonnie never seemed to have any sense of shame, and then, too, his mother was not her mother. He sometimes thought if only Lonnie didn't live there, so that he never would have to be worrying about what she might say or do, he would be perfectly happy; still, he felt sure that if it had not been for Lonnie he never would have been there, and strove to be reconciled accordingly.

“I dare say Aunt Letty's crying her eyes out, and cooking supper for us all into the bargain.”



“That’s so. We better go straight home this minute.”

And unhitching the road wagon they scrambled into the seat and went clattering down the road home.

At the house things were very much as Lonnie had stated. Mrs. Rowley was getting supper and sitting down between whiles for a weep. Bennie had become excessively disgusted with the lonesomeness of the house and greeted Lonnie with enthusiasm.

“Oh, Lonnie!” cried Mrs. Rowley. “Did he go?”

“Yes, of course he went, and a lot of good luck he had, too, and I expect he’s sitting this minute in the car eating a bite and thinking what a good cook you are, and planning how he’ll hurry home. My, what good muffins! You never made such good muffins as that, did you? Come, Bennie, let’s feed kitty, nice kitty!”

“Are the boys coming?”

“Yes, right away. Say, Aunt Letty, can’t we plan some sort of a surprise for Uncle Joe



when he comes back? Boys," as they came in, "can't we think of something nice for Uncle Joe when he comes back?"

"I guess he'll think it's nice enough if we haven't run the farm into a sand bank," said Frank, loftily.

"Of course, the farm's going to be all right; don't go and be babies! But can't we think of something astonishing—something new about the yard or house or buildings, or something?"

"How long will we have?" asked Ted, seating himself at the table and giving an affectionate pat to Bennie to keep him from going to sleep.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Mrs. Rowley, "how long will he be gone?"

"He'll be three days going and three coming back—one week, sure; and if his brother don't hurry about dying he will be there a good while."

"Oh, child, he would bring him home if he wasn't in a dying condition."

"My! Why, then, he wouldn't be there more than a week or two. Well, we would



have two or three weeks, and if we planned right off, quick, we might do a lot."

"I'll tell you," said Ted; "there's been a sight of things sort of waiting around and we could get those done up. There's the chicken-houses to fix, and some of the fencing, and a lot of whitewashing Uncle Joe planned we should do; and there's a lot of that paint we might use up."

"I just wish you'd paint the kitchen floor, if you're going to paint," said Mrs. Rowley.

"All right!" came in a sudden chorus from all three, and then they all laughed.

"We can get a deal of preserving and canning done, Lonnie," said Mrs. Rowley, cheerfully, "and I calculate to make some headway with that sewing against he comes home."

"I reckon we'll think up so much to do we'll be forgetting to water the stock or doing some such trick," put in Frank.

"You won't, at any rate, Frank," said his mother, proudly. "I know your father will feel pride in his son when he comes home—that he will."



## CHAPTER XX

### A RISKY PLAN

MR. ROWLEY's first letter home was written on the journey, so that, glad as they were to hear from him, they were not much wiser than before. His next letter came from Kansas City, and was so brief and written in so hurried a manner that they had only gathered that he had found his brother John very ill and not likely to live. Next came a card merely stating the time of John's death; then a letter written immediately after the funeral, stating that John had desired him to personally fulfill a commission in Indianapolis which might take him several days, and that he would write at once upon arriving there. Consequently, they were confidently expecting a letter in two days, but none came. No letter the next day, nor the next. No one in the house could think or speak of anything else.



“Perhaps he got through his business right off and started home, and he’ll be here without writing,” suggested Lonnie; but it brought only a momentary gleam of hope to Mrs. Rowley. Her depression was so great that she could not seem to look at matters at all as she ordinarily would have done, and Lonnie and the boys soon became aware of what was to them a very terrible phase of her depression. Her mind was persistently running on the strange disappearance of John Rowley so long before, when all efforts by letter had failed to place him; and she was so overwhelmed by that one view of the case that she dreaded to let it be known. Always ready to respond readily to any friendly inquiries, now she could not bear to suggest that she did not know where Mr. Rowley was, or had not heard from him.

Frank went to the post-office, hope rising again to the highest pitch, to receive the same old answer, “Nothing to-day,” and walked out slowly, dreading to go home.



“How are you, Frank? Father coming home soon? When do you expect him?”

Frank shook hands mechanically with the minister; then he took a sudden resolution to ask for advice.

“We don’t know where father is, Mr. Dawson. He told us he was going to Indianapolis and would write at once. The letter ought to have come, at the latest, three days ago, and we haven’t heard anything yet.”

“Is it possible! Where was he to stay in Indianapolis?”

“We don’t know.”

“Where was he staying in Kansas City?”

Frank told him.

“Well, my boy, come down to the office and we will telegraph at once to see where he was going—or whatever else they know.”

Frank’s face brightened up wonderfully. After all, what a thing it was to be a minister and know just what to do!

“Now, Frank, it’s late; you go on home and



drive in to-morrow morning and come to my house."

It was a relief to have done something, and Frank drove in so cheerfully that Ted, who was whitewashing the chicken-houses, felt sure a letter had come at last.

"Letter?"

"No; but I telegraphed to Kansas City."

"The dickens you did! Who put that into your head?"

"Mr. Dawson. Come on, let's go tell mother."

Mrs. Rowley seemed cheered for a few moments at the thought of such a move, and then relapsed into gloom.

Lonnie for two days had had her mind made up as to what she meant to do, but just how to do it she had not been able to decide. This news hurried her up. She was afraid events might take a turn that would effectually forestall her. She had been gradually preparing her way with Mrs. Rowley, taking good care that the boys should not hear her, and now she thought the



time had come for the final stroke. When the boys went out to finish up the chores she began in a lugubrious tone :

“Mark my words, the telegram to-morrow won’t tell a thing!”

“Oh, I suppose not!” groaned Mrs. Rowley.

“I just know he went to Indianapolis the way he said, and I just know he got run over by a wagon or something, the way Ole Olson did in our court, and can’t talk and don’t know where he is, and is just suffering lots!”

“Oh, Lonnie!” groaned Mrs. Rowley, picking up Bennie and rocking gloomily to and fro.

“And I say it isn’t right for us that care about him to let it drag along this way, just boys and anybody they’ve a mind to tell, saying do that and do this, and wasting time while he’s dying, waiting for somebody to come!”

“Oh, Lonnie! What’ll I do? I ought to go search, and I can’t leave Frank nor Bennie, nor the place!”

“Oh, mercy, no!” hastily rejoined Lonnie, horrified to see how she had overdone the mat-



ter. "S'posen there wasn't so very much the matter with him, what would he think of you leaving Frank and Bennie and the place! and," advancing her weightiest argument "the neighbors would be saying you were afraid he'd run off like John Rowley!"

"Oh! oh! oh!" groaned Mrs. Rowley.

Her natural timidity, her dependence on others if away from her own threshold, her real dread of the West, her fear of engines and railroad officials, might all have been heroically set aside if need called; but that last awful thought of the neighborhood thinking that she thought Joe Rowley would do as John Rowley did was something unbearable.

"That's no plan at all!" hurried on Lonnie, "and as for Frank, you'd never dare send Frank! Suppose he would be killed. What would his father say!"

"No, no, never!" cried Mrs. Rowley.

"And Ted—Ted would never do. He would just sit watching the scenery and thinking, and wouldn't know his own hat if he saw it."



"But who is there to go?" sobbed Mrs. Rowley.

Lonnie swiftly dropped down on one knee beside Mrs. Rowley, seized her hands from around Bennie and began kissing them.

"Oh, Aunt Letty," she urged, rapidly, "let me go! Send me! I'll find him! I'll never stop till I get him! I can do it! You know I can do it! Everybody helps a little girl; everybody would tell me. Oh, I can do it! Do let me go!"

"Why, you're too little!" but there was a glow of hope in her eyes; it was her nature to depend on somebody, and that Lonnie was a master hand at doing things she had long known.

"No, I'm not! That will make it all the better. Just think, he may be knowing everything that goes on and not able to say a word, nor to lift a hand, like that woman Mrs. Gates told about, and wondering why some one don't come! Aunt Letty," pulling her hand to secure extra attention, "I'm going! I'm going anyway!



I wouldn't be so wicked as not to ; and I'm going to-morrow ; and when I find Uncle Joe he'll say, 'Oh, Lonnie, I'm glad Aunt Letty let you come ;' and I'll say, 'She didn't let me come, Uncle Joe ;' and he'll say, 'How did you do it, then ?' and I'll say, 'I had an awful hard time—without any money, nor no ticket, nor nothing, but I had to come to find you,' and he'll say, 'Well, well ! I wish Letty'd had the sense to help you, poor little thing.' ”

“How can I let you go, Lonnie?” was the despairing reply. “What will the boys say?”

Lonnie was sure enough what the boys would say.

“The boys aren't to know a word about it, Aunt Letty,” firmly, “nor nobody. You don't want to be shamed by talk. No, indeed. We'll do this way : We'll drive down town to-morrow in time for the nine o'clock, and get that telegram, and it will say 'don't know' sure's you're born, and then you'll tell the boys to go on home to mind the place, while you and I and Bennie go to Boston, and you tell 'em you're



going to talk to your brother Ben, and you can. And then, when we get in town, you're to buy me a ticket to Indianapolis and write who I am on me, and where I live, and where I'm going; that's what they did when they sent Bessie out to somewhere—and a bad lot she was, too. I pity the woman that got her—and I'll go on the twelve o'clock train. I know all about it, and when I get there I'll find him, and I'll bring him back! Now, you must! I'm going, anyway, and this is the best way, and Uncle Joe will be glad you did it, and nobody need know it at all—not at all!”

“Maybe, maybe,” said Mrs. Rowley, bewildered beyond the point of resistance. And Lonnie was sure that things would go her own way now, if she could only keep Mrs. Rowley quiet before the boys.

After supper Mrs. Rowley's gloom began to settle down on her again. She passed a sleepless night, and the longing to do something became so strong that the very thought of sending Lonnie was a relief. After all, why not? Lon-



nie could if any one could. She would send her ; she would think no more about it ; just send her. Having settled that she fell asleep and woke somewhat refreshed, and still of the same mind. She packed a small bag of things for Lonnie and fitted out a basket of provisions, and told the boys that she was going up to talk to Mr. Cook. They were both heartily glad of it, as her unusual gloom had depressed them beyond measure, and they hoped she would return in a more comfortable frame of mind.

As Lonnie predicted, the telegram Mr. Dawson gave them merely said that Mr. Rowley's address or business in Indianapolis were unknown. The boys went back to the farm thoroughly disheartened, and Mrs. Rowley, Lonnie, and Bennie went up to Boston.

Mrs. Rowley managed to get Lonnie prominently labeled by acting strictly according to directions, but buy the ticket she could not. Lonnie performed that ceremony, and also managed to extract a little further information from the agent, who was rather brightened up by talk-



ing to the very pretty little girl. It turned out that the train started at eleven, greatly to Lonnie's joy, for she dreaded lest something should turn up at the last moment to interfere.

“Good-by, Bennie, dear; Lonnie will bring papa to you, Lonnie will! Good-by, Aunt Letty. Don't you worry another minute. I'll bring him home.” Then she showed her ticket, with a secret thrill of pleasure, at the gate and walked on in to where the train stood waiting. Oh, what joy, what unspeakable joy! And a ticket, too!

After the train had pulled slowly out of the long station and Mrs. Rowley, still gazing through the iron gate, had fairly realized that the deed was done past recall, her temporary energy wholly vanished. What had she done! What would people say when they knew she had let such a child start off on a trip without knowing where she was going! What would Lonnie do when she reached Indianapolis? It was the first time that thought had occurred to



her. Her not very active imagination had pictured Lonnie in Indianapolis with Mr. Rowley, and had got no farther. Finally, her mind absolutely refused to act further, and in a hopeless fashion she adjourned to the Cooks. She was so averse to going over her troubles about Mr. Rowley and Lonnie that she felt no sense of disappointment when she found that Mrs. Cook had gone two days before to her mother's, and that Mr. Cook would not be back in their quarters until his wife returned. The good-natured neighbor who gave the news, and who felt sorry for the crying Bennie, invited them to come into her room.

"If you'll do so," she said, with a slight air of injured pride. "Mrs. Cook rather sets herself up above the rest of her neighbors, not but what she's a good woman, too, and perhaps you won't care to set a bit in my parlor." But Mrs. Rowley was desperately thankful to sit down peaceably and try to make Bennie more comfortable and cool him off. She would have been glad not to talk, but Mrs. Brent bustled around, get-



ting a fan and a glass of water, and a gimcrack for Bennie, talking all the while.

“How is Lonnie?”

“Lonnie’s well,” answered Mrs. Rowley, with an effort.

“How is she behavin’ now? I never saw a livelier child in my life than Lonnie!”

“She behaves as well as any child, only she’s smarter than most.”

“Yes, she is smart; but it all ran to mischief!”

“She can be right troublesome, but she does better now than when we first took her.”

“Well, it’s surprisin’! You must be a mighty clever family to put up with her. Now, she just raised hob at the Cooks’. By the way, it wasn’t very long ago one of the hospital doctors was here looking for her. He saw Mrs. Penny, and Mrs. Penny said she knew as how she went to that Home, and told him where it was, but she couldn’t tell him where she was now; and he said that was enough, he could find out there. Very polite man he was. He said Mrs. Lakin



had had him write down some things about Lonnie before she was took off, in case anybody she lived with was anxious to know anything about her."

Mrs. Rowley did not feel in the least anxious to know anything about Lonnie's past, but a ray of light as to her immediate future would have roused her most intense interest.

After Bennie was rested, Mrs. Rowley started out again to take a train for home.

She could not imagine what she would say to the boys, but she knew she would be obliged to say something. She dreaded having the train stop, and when the boys rushed forward to meet her with astonished exclamations of "Where's Lonnie!" she felt as though she must make them keep quiet or become a spectacle there in the station.

"I'll tell you all about it on the road home. Frank, take Bennie, please; he is so tired."

When they were just out of the town, Ted, who was driving, slacked up the horses and Frank began, "Now, where is Lonnie?"



"I don't know what you will say, Frank. I don't know what anybody would say; but she has started to Indianapolis to hunt up your father."

"My sakes alive!" gasped Frank.

"For Indianapolis!" exclaimed Ted.

"Yes; she started at eleven o'clock. I feel as though I had acted so crazy about it myself that I'll be more upset about it than ever if you go to saying she'll get lost or killed or stolen. She said she was going anyway, and I felt sure she would—there's no stopping Lonnie when she's set—and I just felt as though your father would rather I would get her a ticket than have her go a-begging."

"Well, if she said she would, she would," put in Ted. He saw at once how things were; how Lonnie must have worked on Mrs. Rowley, and what a bitter shock Frank was now having because he had not been the one to go.

"I know just what you are thinking, Frank," said Mrs. Rowley, plainly, more of her ordinary practical sense returning to her, now that her



husband's boy was concerned, than she had felt for days. "You think you should have gone. But it was simply impossible to even think of such a thing. If anything had happened to you, your father's life and happiness would have been ruined, and I never should have held my head up again for allowing it. It is a crazy plan, anyway. And you would not have been willing to go yourself until other things had been tried, for your father left a trust to you, and you are not a boy to slight such a thing as that on a small excuse. You are a Rowley."

"She's right, Frank," said Ted, anxiously.

"Yes, mother; all right," and Frank gulped back his disappointment the best way he could.

"Aunt Letty, Lonnie isn't going to get lost, nor killed, nor stolen, nor hurt," remarked Ted, authoritatively. "You needn't to worry the least mite. She'll turn up here on the farm like any other bad cent; and she'll get along fine. Don't you worry; she's sharp as a steel trap!"



## CHAPTER XXI

### IN INDIANAPOLIS

NONE of the adventures that Lonnie had been secretly hoping would overtake her on the trip presented themselves. With every new conductor willing to keep an eye on her, and with each change of cars made under the protection of brakeman or conductor, with very respectable fellow-travelers, all ready to speak kindly to her, and generally anxious to bestow plenty of good advice and sometimes more material benefits in the way of sandwiches and cookies, she could not go far astray. Lonnie did not tell any one she was going to look for her uncle; she invariably said she was going to her uncle. She was very reticent about her past, so far as facts were concerned, and generally managed to talk very voluminously without conveying any information. She actually



tried not to romance to any great extent, and was for the most part very proud of her avoidance of falsehoods.

“What is your uncle’s name?” asked one old lady, who looked to Lonnie as though she was capable of unpleasantly interfering in other people’s affairs.

“Mr. Joseph Rowley.”

“What is his business?”

“He is a farmer.”

“Oh, he doesn’t live in Indianapolis?”

“No’m.”

“How far out does he live?”

“Quite a ways.”

“Has he a family?”

“Yes’m. Frank and Ted and Bennie.”

“It would be better to say Franklin and Theodore and Benjamin.”

“Oh!—”

“How did you happen to be traveling alone?”

“I’m not traveling alone.”

“Why, I thought you were! Who is with you?”



"Oh, more'n one person, sure! I must go get a drink."

When questions became unpleasant she always became thirsty.

When she got far enough on her journey, so that most of her fellow-passengers were also bound for Indianapolis, she became very quiet, and spent her time working up again and again different plans of action. Now, that she was getting there, she must think of something to do first. She was so sure that if she showed uncertainty, or become troublesome in asking for advice, that she would be handed over to the police for safe keeping, that she was afraid to try to make any inquiries on the train.

The last conductor of the trip came to her:

"Well, somebody going to meet you, I suppose!"

"I'll go in the station if nobody's at the car," she answered.

"Yes, that's right! that's the way!"

When the train stopped in the great station, and Lonnie got off with her little valise, the



conductor jumped her off the last step, and said :

“See your folks?”

“No—o—I don’t, right here—I’ll go in the ladies’ waiting-room.”

“That’s right—over there; all right! Good-bye! They’ll come soon!”

“Will they, though,” thought Lonnie, and she walked into the waiting-room very brave, but, withal, very uncertain.

She sat down in order to appear at her ease, and to think. Four dollars and thirty-five cents was the extent of her capital. She had had five dollars, but had spent the balance on train-boy wares.

“Anyway, four dollars and thirty-five cents is a lot,” she meditated.

The waiting-room looked wonderfully handsome to her, and the people, coming and going, interested her so much that she could not seem to plan.

“Suppose I should see Uncle Joe walk right in that door!” and her heart began to beat painfully.



To divert herself she got up and began looking at the time-tables and advertisements.

"It's lucky I can make out to read," she thought. "I'll just read 'em all for practice."

The very first one she looked at was in large, plain letters, which pleased her, and said "Y. M. C. A." There was a picture of a very handsome building, and the words said: "All young men are cordially welcomed. Advice and assistance gladly offered," and a great many more things that struck Lonnie most favorably. She received the impression that it was to some degree "pious," and that made her feel quite safe. She carefully spelled out the address and impressed it on her mind; then, valise in hand, marched boldly out into the street to the first policeman. She had hardly told him where she wanted to go when he stopped a passing car, hustled her on, and said "Y. M. C. A." to the conductor; and the next thing Lonnie knew she saw the building which she had seen depicted on the placard in the station. The conductor had motioned to her, and



apparently in no time at all she was inside the building.

"What do you want, little girl?" said a man.

"I want to see the person who runs this concern," she promptly replied.

The man smiled and escorted her to the secretary.

"And what can we do for you, little girl?" he said.

"Why, I saw down in the station an advertisement that said you gave advice free, and were glad to see folks, and I want some advice. I've got four dollars and thirty-five cents."

The secretary tried hard not to laugh.

"This place is for young men," he said, "not for little girls."

"I'm not young men, I know," said Lonnie, determinedly, "but I need the advice the worst you ever saw. You're religious here, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes," he answered, thinking he should shout, and wondering if religious doubts were oppressing the small damsel.



A gray-haired man had been standing there, previously engaged in conversation with the secretary; he put his hand on Lonnie's shoulder, "Come, little one, come Reeves, come and sit down! Now, child, you tell us the whole story, and we will help you."

"It's this way," said Lonnie, the long-pent-up story bursting forth. "My uncle, Mr. Joseph Rowley—only he isn't really my uncle—got word that his brother, John Rowley, was dying in Kansas City, who hadn't been heard from for years and years—John hadn't. So he started smack off and got there, and his brother died—and was buried"—impressively—"for Uncle Joe wrote us; then he wrote he'd got to go to Indianapolis and would write as soon as he'd got there, and that was the last we heard. We live on a farm near Boston. Aunt Letty was just going crazy, and I said I'd come look for him. The folks in Kansas City didn't know where he was in Indianapolis. So I came, and I'm here. And I want advice to find Uncle Joe, and I want advice what hotel to board at with my



four dollars and thirty-five cents while I look for him. I had five dollars, but I spent the rest for things. Now, what you got to say? Have you seen Uncle Joe?"

Facial paralysis seemed to have afflicted both men at once. Here was a state of things, sure enough. It was difficult to know what to ask first.

"What sort of a man was your Uncle Joe?" inquired the secretary.

Lonnie detected suspicion in the tone.

"Oh, now, you needn't be thinking Uncle Joe ran off like John Rowley! Uncle Joe is a Rowley; father and son, they were honest men. And Uncle Joe is the best man you ever saw—good as gold, and has the finest farm in Massachusetts. And he's mighty religious, too. We have blessing at the table, and Sundays we have regular family prayers and singin' to the organ, and all hands go to church. Fact! Now, Uncle Joe's all right! I say he's got knocked down by a wagon or train, or something, or fell sick so as not to have sense, and I've come to find him."



The elder man saw his way clearly, now.

“We will help you, dear. There is also a Young Women’s Christian Association, and I will take you over there; that is for little girls like you, I am sure, and they will take care of you there, and help you until you find your uncle, and I will see that we help in the search. I shall inquire at all the hospitals, and if he is sick here in Indianapolis we will trace him soon, you may be sure.”

Mr. Stewart did not feel the confidence he expressed, but he meant to spare no effort.

“Have you notified your aunt of your safe arrival?”

“No, but I wrote a card on the train,” trustingly opening her bag and taking out a dirty postal card, saying, “‘I am safe here. I will find Uncle Joe to-morrow. Lonnie.’ Now, if I knew where to mail that!”

Mr. Reeves laid it on a package of mail. “That is going down to the box in a few minutes.”

“Come, Lonnie,” said Mr. Stewart, taking



her bag, "I'll show you the way over now. Good-by, Reeves. I'll be back to plan a campaign."

When Mr. Stewart escorted Lonnie into the building belonging to the Young Women's Christian Association and introduced her to the secretary, Lonnie began to feel tolerably sure of good advice.

Mr. Stewart endeavored to explain the situation as simply as might be, as several young women were standing or sitting near by, as though somewhat anxiously awaiting an interview. One of them, the most poorly dressed one among them, listened very intently, so much so that Lonnie could not help noticing her.

"We will keep her, Mr. Stewart," said the pretty secretary; "just sit down there, dearie," to Lonnie, "and I will take care of you in a few minutes."

Lonnie sat down by the poor-looking girl, sure that the girl wanted to speak to her.

"Are you looking for your uncle, too?" asked Lonnie, cheerfully.



"No," said the girl, in a whisper, "but I believe I know the very man you mean."

"Oh, my!" ejaculated Lonnie.

"Sh-h! Don't make a noise. I don't want to get into any scrape, if it isn't the man. Has he got a full, dark beard, sort of a short beard, and dark hair, and is he a very heavy, square built, thick-set man?"

"Yes! yes!"

"And is there anybody named Hetty?"

"Letty."

"Yes, Letty, that was it. I guess he's the man!"

"Oh, where?" and Lonnie grasped the girl's hands and tried to pull her off her seat.

"Sh-h—now. You'll have to be quiet if you want to get any more out of me. I just left that place. I couldn't stand it no longer; it's a boarding-house, and the meanest people I ever saw in my life; and terrible bad doings, too, I can tell you, when it comes to money-stealing and such."

"Oh, where?"



“Sh-h—now. I’ll tell you all about it. It’s over a week ago now, Plunkett—he’s a man kind o’ belongs to the boarding-house—came driving up in a cab, and when he gets the house-door open—I was there with the missus—he says, winkin’, ‘Here’s a new boarder, and a sick one, too. We’ll have to charge him mighty high; and he’s got the tin, too!’ says he; and I took the traps, and the cabby and Plunkett kind o’ lifted and pulled the man out, and he seemed mighty poorly, and they got him up to the worst room in the house, and they put him on the bed, and he was groanin’ and lookin’ mighty sick, and only comin’ to onct in a while. They didn’t do much for him, but the missus told me to take off his shoes, and I done all I could. I was so sorry for him, a nice-looking man, in that hole. Well, he had a fever, and the missus said it was typhoid, and Plunkett said it was malarial fever, and they all said it was somethin’ different, and they didn’t have no doctor—”

Lonnie’s face was white and red by turns, and her eyes were staring strangely at the girl.



“And the missus she first takes every paper and book and everything he had, and chucks it in the stove down-stairs, only his pocket-book, and then she looked him over for more money, and took a bag of money tied around his neck under his shirt; and she counted it sos’t I heard, and she wasn’t careful, for she’d been drinking, and she said ‘over two hundred;’ and then she told Plunkett there wasn’t nothing on him only thirty dollars, and he carried on awful and knew she’d cheated, but he was afraid of her, and it’s been dreadful ever since; and most all the time the man’s been out of his head, and only just ’tended to what I could do, and me drove to death beside. I couldn’t stand it, and I come here to see where I could go to, but I wasn’t goin’ to say nothin’ about the man, for I was afraid they’d kill me wherever I was. But I can’t help it. He’ll die sure, and he seems like a terrible strong man, too.”

Lonnie gave one scream, and, still clutching the girl’s dress, she reached for the secretary.

“Oh, come! hurry quick! He’s dying! She



knows! don't wait! Come—where's Mr. Stewart? Don't let her get away! Oh, hold her!"

"Child, child, what is the matter?"

"It's Uncle Joe; hurry, I say! I've found him! Hurry, hurry, hurry! Oh, where's Mr. Stewart?"

The secretary saw something prompt must be done for Lonnie, and, quickly telling a helper to take her place, she picked up her hat, and, telling the two girls to follow, started to see if Mr. Stewart had left the building. He had, but they at once followed him to the Y. M. C. A., and found him with Mr. Reeves.

"We seem to need your help, gentlemen," said she, promptly, "and if you can just unravel this it may turn out to be very much to the point."

The girl told her story again, very clearly, giving the address, and then went off under the secretary's protection, while Mr. Stewart, Mr. Reeves, and Lonnie, drove rapidly to the Chief of Police, got an officer and an ambulance, for it was evident that if the girl's story was true,



somebody was in need of help, whether it should prove to be Lonnie's uncle or not.

They drove to the door and rang, and though when the door was opened some one immediately tried to slam it shut, they pushed in and Mr. Stewart and Lonnie, without waiting for any explanation, pushed on at once to the room described by the girl. The policeman, who had had business in that house before, and was already in need of one of the inmates, and the woman herself, stayed below to converse, while Mr. Reeves played the part of audience.

When Lonnie opened the door, for she had darted ahead of Mr. Stewart, she gave a low cry and knelt down by the side of the bed. "Oh, Uncle Joe!" she sobbed, "oh, Uncle Joe!" White faced, with ragged hair and beard, his thin pallid hands restlessly fumbling his shirt sleeves, his preternaturally dark eyes sunken and roving, surely not one in ten could have recognized Joseph Rowley. At the sound of Lonnie's voice the hands ceased their motion, the dark eyes turned toward the bedside.





"OH, UNCLE JOE!"  
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“Lonnie?” The voice sounded faint and far away, but inexpressibly gentle.

“Oh, Uncle Joe,” half whispered Lonnie, “I’ve come! You’re going home, Uncle Joe, to the farm and Aunt Letty and Frank and Bennie and—and—the cows, Uncle Joe—and the sweet smells, Uncle Joe.” She smoothed his face with her soft little hand and petted him. Like a flash it had gone over her how frightful this must be to Mr. Rowley, a clean, wholesome man, all his life long used to clean, careful, ways, and this—this house; the filthy bed, the close, foul air. Lonnie knew it all so well; it was not new to her. The house had seemed familiar the moment she entered it, worse perhaps—no, not worse.

Mr. Reeves came to the door. “The ambulance is here,” he said, softly, his cheeks paling slightly at the sight of the man’s condition. “Can you help me, Mr. Stewart?”

“Indeed I can.”

They hastily did what they could about his clothing, and when the ambulance men came



up they all carried him down. The very breath of street air seemed to revive him slightly, and he murmured "Lonnie."

"Here I am, Uncle Joe," said Lonnie. She had stopped a moment by the policeman.

"We want Uncle Joe's two hundred dollars—now—remember—two hundred dollars."

"Yes, all right, ma'am," said the policeman, with a grin at the curly-haired little maid.

To the hospital they went, and Lonnie was forced to wait restlessly in the visitors' room until the nurses had bathed Mr. Rowley and placed him in a snowy cot in one of the wards. Mr. Stewart waited for her. The physician in charge was opposed at first to Lonnie's remaining to see the patient, but he felt obliged to yield to her pleading eyes and voice.

"Oh, I must see him clean and comfortable," she begged. "I must. I must telegraph Aunt Letty. I'll dream about him all night, that dreadful way I saw him." So after what seemed to Lonnie an interminable length of time a nurse led her into the ward and she tip-



toed softly to the bed. There lay Uncle Joe, thin and pale to be sure, and looking more ghostlike because he was sleeping, but with neat hair, and beard trimmed, and with clean clothes, and there seemed to be a peaceful expression withal on the worn face.

"Poor Uncle Joe," said Lonnie, softly, and just barely touching the thin hands with her lips, she was ready quietly to go out with the nurse.

"A very fine little girl," said the physician to Mr. Stewart so that Lonnie heard him. "Good stuff; remarkable!"

"Guess I'll have to live with a doctor," thought Lonnie; "they appreciate me."

Mr. Stewart proposed that Lonnie should telegraph home, and she eagerly acquiesced.

"Yes, and please let me do it! Frank won't think he's the only big one in the family then. I want to do it myself."

"What is it you want to do?" asked Mr. Stewart, smiling.

"Why, telegraph!"



“How would you do it?”

“Why, I don’t know! How do you do it? I want it to read ‘Lonnie’ at the end of it—not ‘Mr. Stewart.’”

“Oh, is that all! All right, my dear. But you are not to use more than ten words.”

“Oh, no, of course not; ten words is a plenty. I wouldn’t want to write any more than that.”

“Let me see if you can do it.”

And she did it. And the next morning Frank went dashing home from the village on horseback, bearing a telegram to his mother which read:

“I found Uncle Joe. He is sick. Coming home soon. Lonnie.”



## CHAPTER XXII

### HOME AGAIN

MR. ROWLEY began to improve immediately upon his removal to the hospital. The physician said he must not only have been a very strong man, but one who had led a very healthful, regular life.

When Lonnie was first allowed to talk to him his eyes shone with gladness.

"I dreamed you were here, Lonnie," he said, brokenly, "and then they told me. How did it happen?"

And Lonnie told him in a bright, cheerful way how it happened, and before the nurse made her bid him good-by he was in possession of the main facts.

"I should have died in that hole if it hadn't been for Lonnie," he thought when she had gone. "There never was her equal for pluck



and smartness ! She just seems inspired to do the right thing at the right minute, and never to flinch until she has put it through."

The next day Mr. Rowley was allowed to talk more, and he told Lonnie how he happened to be in such a plight.

"You see, Lonnie, it was this way," he said. "I found brother John very low and he seemed to be dying of typhoid malaria, and just a general giving out. As soon as he knew me he seemed sort of crazy like to have me right by him, and I never left him, day nor night, until he died ; and I didn't get any rest except snoozing a little in the chair. Then came the funeral and all, and a winding up of John's business, and he'd quite a bit of property tucked away one way and another ; and the cooking at that house nearly laid me out. I couldn't stomach it. There's no cook in the world like your Aunt Letty, Lonnie !"

"'Deed no !" assented Lonnie, zealously.

"And what with hot biscuit, and boiled coffee, and greasy potatoes, and raw bacon, I was



feeling dreadful down ; and the day I left Kansas City I was so dizzy I couldn't see. I couldn't scarcely sit up to save me. The conductor helped me off here in this town, and mighty glad he was to get me off his hands. A man steps up to me quick like and says, 'Any one to meet you?' and I shook my head, too gone to speak ; and he says, 'Don't live here?' and I shook my head, and he says, 'Friends?' and I shook my head, and he says, 'You're sick. I'll get a carriage and take you to a nice, comfortable home boarding-house, where you'll be well taken care of,' and I was mighty thankful to him, for I didn't feel able to hold my head up another minute, and the station and trains and people were all spinning around and around me. I knew he got me in a cab and got me to a house and hustled me into the worst hole of a room and the vilest bed I ever dreamed of ; and I was too sick to move. If it hadn't been for a girl they had there, that I could just half see when I was a mite easier, cleaning me up a trifle, and giving me a bit of



air, and fetching me a drink after I had thought I was a corpse a dozen times over, I surely should have died. Then I don't know what did happen ; just seems hazy misery, only I know positive there couldn't be any worse feelings. Then this nice, clean place—and all through you, Lonnie. Heaven knows I'm thankful! And oh, how my heart did cry out to Letty and the children! If I can only get back there!”

“We'll be going soon, Uncle Joe. You can sit up a bit to-morrow, and the doctor says you'll get well just as fast as anybody could, and then we will go home. It was that girl that took care of you that told me about you. At the Y. W. C. A.,” hesitatingly, “they say she could get a real nice place to work, about fifteen miles away from here, if she only had decent things to go with.”

“You don't say! Well, I'm thankful that I can hand over money for her to have them! Who came with you here, Lonnie?”

“The secretary, Miss Hasler, and she's going to stop for me.”



“Well, now, dear, you just see if she won’t come see me a minute. I want to talk to her!”

So Lonnie asked the nurse, and when Miss Hasler came she made a short call on Mr. Rowley, and went back to her temporary protégé, the unfortunate and bereft little serving maid, able to rejoice her soul by a prospect of a good outfit of clothes and a new and safe “place.”

“Uncle Joe,” said Lonnie one day when Mr. Rowley was sufficiently recovered to walk a little, “what did you come to Indianapolis for?”

“Why, Lonnie, it’s sort of a sad story. You see, John Rowley thought Jane Harding had thrown him over, though I thought he was all wrong about it, and he went off mighty wrought up; he traveled a good bit and saw things, and made quite a lot of money, and finally, a number of years ago, he married. It was a poor business. The girl he married didn’t care much about him, and was really all taken up grieving for another man, who’d gone off and left her; and John knew it, but he always was uncommon soft-hearted, and he thought he



could help her and that she would grow to be satisfied with him. And she ought to have been," angrily. "The long and the short of it was that when their little girl was about a year old—they had a little girl—his wife ran off and took the little girl—he named her after our mother, Ruth—and left him. Then he was sick at heart. He tried to look around quiet like for her, but couldn't find anything of her, and then he hoped she would come back to him. And everything looked dark to him. John Rowley had a way of getting hurt always. And he showed it; just a broken, hopeless man, and he younger than I! Well, he had heard not a great while ago that his wife had an aunt, or some relation, living here in Indianapolis, and he had been thinking of coming to inquire to see if he could get any trace of the little girl. He had quite a bit of property for the little girl, if she's ever found, and for my boys if she isn't."

"But, Uncle Joe, we'll be starting home in two days. Don't you want a policeman, or some-



body that knows how, to talk with you, and see if that person is here yet?"

"What a head you have got, Lonnie! A sick man isn't fit to think of anything, I declare!"

Inquiry, however, proved conclusively that the person in question had long since left Indianapolis.

The day came for their departure. Miss Hasler and two or three others who had been making themselves responsible for Lonnie, and Mr. Stewart and Mr. Reeves, who had both conceived a warm regard for Mr. Rowley, all went down to the train to see the travelers off. Mr. Rowley looked like a man who had been at death's door, but he was rapidly improving and his eyes had regained their old expression.

It was a hard journey, but whatever could be done for him people did. Lonnie won the approval and good-will of every one they traveled with for her devotion to her "Uncle Joe." Mr. Rowley knew the conductor on the last section of the trip, and they greeted each other like old friends.



"What a nice little girl that is of yours," the conductor said to Mr. Rowley. "Seems so reliable."

"Reliable? Indeed, now, she is reliable!"

"Lonnie," he said later, "aren't you getting to be uncommonly reliable?"

Lonnie smiled broadly. "I knew you'd find out I was reliable some time."

When they reached Boston there were Mr. and Mrs. Cook and Bennie Cook to meet them, and see them safely on the home train, and then at home—at the station—the crowd of friends was so large that the excitement of it seemed likely to prove too much for Mr. Rowley, and Lonnie peremptorily decreed that they were to go home at once.

Mrs. Rowley was openly weeping, Frank could scarcely control himself, and Ted was endeavoring to confine his attentions to Lonnie and Bennie for fear of getting in the way. Crowds of people were there to see, and many an old neighbor wanted to shake hands. But home they went, and when Lonnie actually in-



sisted, and made a fuss until she gained her point, that Mr. Rowley was to go straight to bed and be nursed up again, Mrs. Rowley's joy knew no bounds. Now she could fuss and putter and cook and coddle to her heart's content. Sickness with uncertainty or danger about it unnerved Mrs. Rowley beyond recall; but a nice, safe weariness, a good convalescence—it was bliss indeed!

“Well, Letty, what a good wife you are!” Mr. Rowley murmured, whereupon Letty immediately sat down and wept most refreshingly.

“Oh, father,” whispered Frank, hesitatingly, “I wish it had been me to get you!”

“Frank, my good boy, I know you do. But you've proved you are a Rowley, that you could keep your trust. I'll never have any doubt of you, Frank. You're the pride of your father's heart!”

“Anyway, father,” said Frank, cheering up a little, “I guess you'll be surprised when you get out to-morrow and see things!”

And Mr. Rowley was surprised. He had al-



ways taken pleasure in the appearance of his farm. His fences and his outbuildings, and his gates, and all the farm appurtenances had been kept strictly in good order. The house, too, had always been kept in good repair, but of late years there had not been much attempt at the beautiful. Mrs. Rowley had been brought up to think a great deal of flowers and was quite an expert with them; but beyond a bed or so which she could manage herself, that she might preserve a windowful of plants for her comfort in winter, she had not undertaken much. The grass had always been cut with a scythe, and Mrs. Rowley had always had a grieved feeling about the appearance of the immediate house lot, as the places of one or two of her friends looked much better. She felt that if she should say much about it Mr. Rowley would be very glad to do anything she wanted, but until Lonnie's coming they had all been living under a cloud. Mrs. Rowley felt that she had been a complete failure as far as Frank was concerned. Nothing she could do seemed to



please him, and Mr. Rowley was so depressed over Frank's behavior and the lack of geniality in their home that she could not bear to mention anything that seemed like making herself more conspicuous or an added tax.

She had been delighted with the boys' determination to whitewash and paint during Mr. Rowley's absence, and had hoped, if their interest held out, as she thought it would, to get them to help her in reforming the appearance of the yard. Then came the period of anxiety, during which no thought of grass or plants entered her head, though the boys kept on at their self-appointed tasks in a dogged and perfunctory manner. When Lonnie's telegram reached them the awful fear that held them all spell-bound was lifted, and the reaction was at once one of lightheartedness and activity. Mrs. Rowley confided to the boys her hopes of making their place look as well as the Wheeler's, and the competitive spirit took hold of them promptly. Mrs. Rowley used some of her treasured chicken-money, already sadly depleted



by Lonnie's ticket, on a lawn mower; and the boys, scarcely taking time to eat, mowed and spaded and trimmed the walks, and though, as Mrs. Rowley regretfully assured them, it was not the time of year at all to do such work, a little judicious cutting and binding and digging up and setting out, and otherwise performing, made a most astonishing difference.

Lonnie had taken in the changed appearance of the place as soon as she had a chance to run out and look at things, but she had been urgently requested to hold her peace and let Mr. Rowley see it for himself on the morrow.

The neat looking walks, newly-painted gates, closely-cut grass, trimmed vines, and newly-painted porches and benches astonished Mr. Rowley as much as could have been desired. His eyes were enlightened also as to his wife's wishes. He felt convicted; for he had thought it strange that, splendid housekeeper as Letty was, she should care so little for the appearance of the yard. He had attributed it to her being so busy with the house and with Bennie. An



understanding of the real state of affairs came to him as he saw the warm glow of happiness in her eyes when he praised all that had been done. "My good, good Letty!" he whispered, involuntarily. Then when he saw the sudden flushing of her face, he assured himself that he must always have been a brute, and that it was lucky he had been ill and must rest for a while, as it would give him time to plan a new start. But to his wife, Joseph Rowley was a name standing for everything good and kind and helpful.

"Ted did all the chicken yards, father," explained Frank, as they looked down the slight slope to the gleaming white of the freshly whitewashed little buildings. "Ted—die goo' bo—ee," solemnly asseverated Bennie. As it was his first remark containing more than one word, every one stared at him in admiring astonishment, while his mother proceeded to kiss and hug him nearly to extermination.

"I should think he was a good boy!" assented Mr. Rowley. "Frank is the best boy in the world, and Ted is the best boy in the world, and Lonnie



is the best boy—no, best girl—in the world, and Bennie is the best baby on record, and—and—”

“And you need to go and sit down,” laughed Lonnie, “or you’ll be the best wreck in the world.”

“It appears like we’re all mighty well satisfied with ourselves,” beamed Mrs. Rowley. “Here, Lonnie, you see to Bennie while I go whip up an egg for your Uncle Joe.”

The children all went off to the barn to see new sights and to hear more of Lonnie’s adventures, which lost nothing in the telling; and Mrs. Rowley, having whipped the egg and mixed it in a way to tempt the most fastidious, sat down on the porch beside her husband to talk while he enjoyed it.

“So John Rowley was married after all, and left a little girl! Do tell! And you couldn’t get any trace of her! Like enough she’s dead!”

“I’m loth to think that.”

“If it was only like Lonnie, now, you could probably find out.

“How’s that?”

Then Mrs. Rowley detailed what Mrs. Brent



had said in regard to the physician who came looking for Lonnie.

“Well, well!” said Mr. Rowley. “I’ll have to look that up. Some time, perhaps, she’ll be wanting to know about her parents.”

“Less known the better, I’m thinking,” incredulously.

“May be; but I’ll have to see to it. I’m trying to plan what steps I’d best take to look for John’s little Ruth. When I’m stronger perhaps I can think of something; but I never was any hand to scheme. Lonnie, now, might hit on something right off.”

“I was surprised to find how I missed Lonnie,” said Mrs. Rowley, speculatively. “I rather thought it would rest me; but after the first day it didn’t; and I just built such hopes on her finding you. I hope you won’t go to stirring up any mare’s nest about Lonnie to take her off, now we’re used to her.”

“No danger,” laughed Mr. Rowley. “She seems regularly one of us now—getting real Rowley like.”



## CHAPTER XXIII

### AN INVESTIGATION

WHEN Mr. Rowley was first able to go to Boston he investigated the subject of the physician and Lonnie. It took him a good while, but he managed it, and he ever after looked on that little piece of work as the finest evidence of keen insight and intellectual ability his life presented.

He found the doctor, Doctor Albers, and also found that the man's well-intentioned effort to find Lonnie's whereabouts in Walnut Court had been his last.

"Really quite slipped my mind. Not that there was very much on the subject, anyway," taking a note-book out of his pocket and hastily glancing through it. "Lakin, Lakin! Oh, yes, Lakin; rather wandering and couldn't remember names, but wanted me to tell any



one that had the child Lonnie that she had given the papers and things the child's mother gave her to her priest, Father O'Connor, of Holy Cross. Sorry she hadn't done as she promised the child's mother she would. Didn't think the child's mother was in her right senses, anyway; and I'm sure she wasn't," added the doctor energetically, shutting up his note-book. "Nothing to it, you see, unless Father O'Brien, or whatever his name was, has the papers, if she ever gave him any."

Mr. Rowley next looked up Father O'Connor. After some trouble he managed to explain his position, what he wanted, and why. Father O'Connor in his turn explained that Mrs. Lakin had been, for a short time, a member of his flock, and during that time she had given him some papers for safe-keeping. Then he went to look them up and see if any referred to the child in question. So while Mr. Rowley sat dolefully staring at a few framed photographs on the walls Father O'Connor searched through pigeon-hole after pigeon-



hole, and finally, with a satisfied grunt, placed a small package on the table before Mr. Rowley.

Then began one of the strangest experiences of Mr. Rowley's life. He read unsuspectingly enough :

“TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN :—Will whomever takes charge of my daughter, Ruth Lonnette Rowley, after my death communicate with her father, John Rowley, of Kansas City, Mo., or, in the event of his not being found, with her aunt and my sister, Lonnette Dessar, of Indianapolis.

“RUTH DESSAR ROWLEY.”

A curious faintness came over Mr. Rowley. He was not yet altogether strong. He read the odd but plain little document again. It was simple enough. Lonnie John's little girl! Then, almost crushing him, came the thought of John Rowley, heavy-hearted, worn out, and dying, faintly clinging to life because of that one thing—that little lost child; and then of himself, strong and well off, and come direct



from that very little girl, having seen her bright and happy and well cared for, and yet had let John die without telling him of her! Oh, how could it have been! How could it happen! He could not repress a groan.

"What is the matter?" Father O'Connor was at his side with a glass of water.

"The little girl is my brother's child, and he died without knowing I had her safe."

The priest smiled. "The thing for you to do is to be glad you have her safe. She was far from safe, I can assure you, with Mrs. Lakin."

Mr. Rowley felt that to be true, but the thought of his brother would not leave him. The only other papers were two letters, one from John Rowley to Ruth Dessar just previous to their marriage, and the other a letter written by Lonnette Dessar, the sister, when Lonnie was born.

On his way home he kept wondering what they would all say to this strange news. Lonnie a Rowley! a real Rowley! John's little girl! And with quite a bit of money, too, from John;



and cousin to Frank and Bennie. What would they all say?

When he reached home the family assembled in a great hurry to hear all the news, Lonnie, as usual, seating herself squarely in front of Mr. Rowley at close range so that she might miss nothing.

"Well, father," said Frank, "was Lonnie's father hung or was he a gravedigger?"

"Or—a was he a millionaire?" whispered Ted to Lonnie.

Then something about Mr. Rowley's face brought a sudden silence on the group. Mrs. Rowley moved uneasily and murmured, "Your father looks clean tuckered out, children, do be quiet."

"Yes, I saw the thing through," began Mr. Rowley, abruptly. "No, I can't make a long story of it. Lonnie's mother's name was Ruth Dessar Rowley. Her father's name was John Rowley, of Kansas City, Missouri; and her name is Ruth Lonnette Rowley. She is your own cousin, Frank."



Lonnie was staring with wide-open eyes. Then her face began to wrinkle. She jumped up from her seat with a convulsive sob and dashed through the circle out of the house.

"For the land's sake, Lonnie!" ejaculated Mrs. Rowley.

"What ails the child?" said Mr. Rowley, in amazement, at the open door.

"Christmas!" and Frank whistled to relieve his feelings.

"You paralyzed her, Uncle Joe, for once in her life," said Ted, half wistfully; he knew he wasn't a Rowley, but he wished he was.

"Now, you all wait right here," said Mr. Rowley, quietly. "I didn't show good sense;" and he walked rapidly to the barn. He heard Lonnie sobbing in the hay-loft and went to her.

"Lonnie, Lonnie, what is the matter?" he said, gently.

"Oh, Uncle Joe!" and Lonnie threw her arms around his arm and gripped it tight. "I'm so glad I'm a Rowley! I'm so glad! And



oh, Uncle Joe, I'm so afraid you are disappointed about me being a Rowley !”

“You poor child !” said Mr. Rowley. Then he stopped. “I'm no talker at all, Lonnie, but I'm proud to have you a Rowley. I know that you are true as steel ; that you always will be ; that you are reliable to the backbone ; that you are a real Rowley !” I'm proud to call you a Rowley !”

Lonnie's sobs stopped, and she kissed him ecstatically.

Lonnie's return to the house was as triumphant as her exit had been depressed. “There, Frank, I'm as much a Rowley as you are !”

“Come, now,” bristled up Mrs. Rowley. “I've got an idea myself, and it's a good one. Here's Lonnie turned into a Rowley and regularly one of the family, and she's done a heap for all of us finding father just in the nick of time ; and let's have a regular celebration. Joe, you were telling me John's Ruth was born the tenth of August. Now, let's set to and celebrate Lonnie's being a Rowley then, and have a time,



and have all the folks she's had to do with since she left—well, since she broke up last fall.”

“Oh, goody!” squealed Lonnie.

“There'll be Brother Ben and his wife and Bennie Cook—”

“And Jane Harding at the Home,” put in Mr. Rowley, enthusiastically.

“And Kate and Mary and that teacher, whatever her name was—I'd like to have them,” said Lonnie.

“And Miss Joyce,” said Mrs. Rowley.

“Yes, and Maggie; I just must have Maggie,” added Lonnie.

“And then there'll be people from here. The minister and the doctor and all the rest,” continued Mrs. Rowley.

“Good enough; we'll do it! A regular doings like you can, Letty. I'll get everything in shape for it!” Mr. Rowley slapped his knee determinedly.

“And if it rains we can eat in the barn,” suggested Ted, laughingly.

“Well, we could, Ted, really,” from Lonnie.



“Couldn’t we, Uncle Joe? With the wagons out, and all trimmed up with oak branches and ferns and things, and the cool air blowing through, it would be lots prettier than in the house.”

“That’s so, Lonnie. Splendid. If we don’t eat out here on the side lawn we’ll eat in the barn.”

“Lawn’s good—eh?” whispered Frank to Ted.

“Yes, we’ll have Jane Harding, the matron. I meant to tell you, Lonnie, that among brother John’s things was a box like the one you told me you broke, and when John died I thought I would give it to you to give to the matron, as John gave her the other. You can do it when you go to invite her.”

The talk about the festivity lasted a long time, until Mr. Rowley reminded the boys that the farm work had got to get a good start if there was going to be any such goings on as that in the middle of August.

Mr. Rowley was obliged to be very careful



about working in the heat, but he had been able to secure such good farm help, that he devoted quite a little of his time to Lonnie's celebration. He had a secret feeling that John would have liked it, and that it might in some way help make up for his dying without knowing that Lonnie was safe.

He drove to Boston that Lonnie might go with him and deliver her invitations. She went first to the Home. Kate let her in.

"Oh, Kate, I've come to invite you to a party! And Mary, and that teacher—what's her name?"

"Miss West."

"Oh, yes, and the matron."

"Are you crazy as ever! Come in. You haven't come back to stay, have you?"

"No, indeed; I don't mean to stay! I'm fixed now; I've been turned into a Rowley! Where's the matron? I've got a present for her?"

"Another present! Presents are good as far as they go, but you can't give her back something you spoiled once," significantly.



"I can pretty near do it," was the unabashed answer.

"How do you do, Aunt Jane! I've brought you another present."

"How do you do, Lonnie! You may sit down and talk a few minutes, if you have time."

"Here's the present," said Lonnie, eagerly. "Look at it now, won't you?"

As the matron opened the package her face became suddenly very pale. "Where did you get this, Lonnie?" she asked in a strained voice.

"Mr. Rowley was telegraphed to go out to Kansas City, Missouri, to Mr. John Rowley, and when he came back he brought this box, and he said I might give it to you, because I said it was just like the one of yours I broke."

"And—Mr.—John—Rowley?" asked the matron, with difficulty.

"He's dead."

There was no sound in the room for a moment. Some long-cherished hope had received



its death blow. As Lonnie stared nervously at the matron's white face, rigid now from her stern effort to preserve her self-control, a keen, swift sense of the underlying note of the matron's life came to her. She remembered what Mr. Rowley had said in Kansas City, and she remembered particularly a long conversation she had heard one night between Mr. Rowley and his wife after she had gone to bed.

"You made a mistake," she said abruptly, only half conscious of what was impelling her, just feeling that in this moment the only relief the matron could have must be the lifting of the blame from John Rowley's shoulders to Jane Harding's.

"He thought it was you who could not care. He was always lonesome, always heartsick, and no one ever loved him. I'm his little girl, and my mamma wasn't kind to him. She wasn't, she wasn't, she wasn't!" with a half sob.

Though no one dreamed it, her father had become to her a very hero, and one calculated to rouse all the fierce, pitying affection her



repressed little heart could give to one she thought of as loving, and silent, and hurt, and wronged, and forsaken.

“His little girl!” murmured the matron.

“Yes, his little girl,” and Lonnie was really crying, and for some one beside herself. Here was some one who would rather hear about John Rowley, her father, than about any one else in the world, and she could speak, though no one else should ever hear her.

“Why didn’t you love him more? Uncle Joe said everybody was always hurting his feelings, and he was brave and proud, and he couldn’t do anything but go away and wait and keep quiet. And he looked for me always, but couldn’t find me. Nothing went right. Well,” dabbing at her face, “I came to ask you to a party I’m to have, on my birthday, the tenth of August, because they’ve found I’m a Rowley; and I want Kate and Mary to come, and Miss West to come. You will, won’t you?”

“Come here, dear—there, kneel down there, so I can see your face.” She took the pretty little



face between her hands and gazed earnestly at it. "I don't know—no—I don't see much of John Rowley in it; though there always was something about the eyes—well." The matron kissed the little face. "You will love me, won't you, dear?" she said, gently. "Yes, yes, we will all come to your party. There, no more now. You must go. There—good-by."

The rest of the invitations were given that day, and that night Miss Joyce said smilingly to Maggie: "Maggie, you and I are invited to a party together."

"For mercy's sake!" stammered Maggie.

"Fact, Maggie. It has turned out that Lonnie, that perfectly lovely little flutter-budget, is the niece of the people she is living with, the Rowleys, and she is to have a party to celebrate the discovery of the fact, and she has invited both of us. And what is more, Maggie, we are both going. I mean to drive you out there myself."

"For mercy's sake!" smiled Maggie.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A REAL ROWLEY

THERE was no sign of rain on the tenth of August. Early morning found the Rowleys all agog for the great celebration. The floor of the barn had been cleared of everything movable. The huge east and west double doors had been flung clear back and the fragrant breeze swept through like a benediction. The boys had brought a wagon load of fresh-smelling branches, and banks of damp ferns and moss made the place look like a forest green-house. Mrs. Rowley had secured a safe place for her cold dishes, and had it packed with ice, and there the boys deposited their freezers after Mrs. Rowley had satisfied herself that the ice-cream had "come."

Those cold dishes! How Mrs. Rowley and Lonnie had gloated over their preparation—



Lonnie all ecstatic admiration, Mrs. Rowley all righteous pride.

Mr. Rowley had taken a world of interest in it all, praising Mrs. Rowley's skill as a cook until she looked five years younger. Then when she heard Frank vigorously asserting to Ted that there wasn't a woman in the world that could cook like his mother, she went to work then and there and made a most astonishing concoction calculated to rejoice the inner man or boy, and then, hesitatingly, but without actually flinching, she wrote on a slip of paper, "For my good son, Frank, from his loving mother," and deposited the whole thing under the chip-basket in the woodshed, where Frank would be sure to find it. Find it he did, and after reading the paper, with a flushing face and an uneasy glance to see that he was not observed, he put the paper in his pocket and then called Ted and Lonnie to come share his feast. Lonnie brought Bennie, and a try all around induced them to set aside a meager portion for Mr. Rowley before the persuasive delicacy of flavor should prove too much for them.



“Mother, that was the best stuff I ever ate,” he said, emphatically, and added, with a frank smile, not yet a very frequent thing between him and his step-mother, “and I liked the reading better yet.”

“My sakes, Frank, but you’re going to have the same taking sort of way your father has!” exclaimed Mrs. Rowley; and she knew of no more substantial praise.

Before the first guest arrived the long tables constructed for the occasion were covered with their fine linen and made to look exceedingly inviting by the vases of cool-looking sprinkled ferns. Through the great doors toward the west one could see the long slope of meadow down to the grove where the brook ran, and through the great doors toward the east one could see the elms and walnut and pine trees around the house, which, with its clean whiteness and green shutters and shady vines, had long seemed to Lonnie the ideal of architectural beauty.

Mr. Rowley, in the unaccustomed leisure of



this week-day, was walking slowly from one point to another looking out over his farm, as fine a farm as any in the State, thinking over this and that, and not a little of Lonnie.

"Lonnie's been a regular mascot in this family," he thought. "Things aren't much like a year ago. I would scarcely know Frank was the same boy." He stopped with a pleased smile on his face listening to sounds of laughter from the room over the dining-room that had been handed over to Frank and Ted together. Then he heard the boys come running down stairs and watched them as they came out on the porch. Frank, boy as he was, carried himself with a certain dignity of manner that became him well, and was, as Mr. Rowley thought, "all Rowley." And Ted, still the philosopher, but a much more robust and better fed and better satisfied philosopher than formerly, his quiet, pleasant face very ready to respond to the humor of any situation, followed Frank out, suggesting that they practice up on the *rôle* appointed them of general



utility men. Mr. Rowley had bought both the boys new suits for the occasion, and his face glowed with satisfaction as he called them and saw them coming toward him. "Claites mak' a differ," he thought, "and Frank such a Rowley; just cut out for a first-class farmer, a man to depend on and to be a power in the district; just the man for the Legislature, too," he thought, almost laughing at his own enjoyment of the notion. "And Ted now—born for books and such like; couldn't make a farmer of him in a thousand years, nor a business man either; just the kind of a boy for college; and he shall go, too, unless I'm mightily mistaken in either him or myself."

The boys stopped and looked back toward the house; out on the porch came Lonnie with Bennie. Bennie, fat, sturdy, yellow-haired and smiling, all the glory of his fresh white dress hidden under a clean blue apron.

"Just look at Bennie!" called Lonnie, "isn't he just the nicest baby!" and she stopped to give him a tremendous hug and kiss, which he



returned with interest. Lonnie to him was the very spice of life. All manner of happiness could always be found in her society.

“Bennie’s just worth his weight in gold,” thought Mr. Rowley, proudly, and then he looked at Lonnie again. John’s little girl! And such a pretty little girl! Her cheeks like wild roses, her eyes snapping with fun under their long eyelashes, her curly hair flashing out all sorts of little bronze and gold gleams with every motion. Oh, but she was pretty; her pink dress and white apron, costume of her own choosing, seemed to be the one arraying above all others that she would look her prettiest in.

“Oh, Uncle Joe! See Bennie! and he said, ‘Mo’ man, mo’ lady, mo’ boy.’ He knows all about my party!”

“Mo’ man?” began Bennie.

“Yes, dear.”

“Mo’ lady?”

“Yes, more lady.”

“Mo’ bo—ee?”

“Yes, more boy.”



“ Papa down town ? ”

“ No, Frank’s going. . Oh, Frank, why don’t you hurry ! ”

“ Shall I go now, father ? ” said Frank.

“ Yes. You won’t have to wait long now. Drive carefully, Frank. ”

“ All right. Come on, Ted ! ”

And away they went with the spring wagon to the station to meet the Cooks and the Home delegation. Not long after they had gone Mrs. Rowley bustled out on the porch and sat down, with Bennie in easy reach, that she might whip off his apron at the first sound of wheels.

The sound came so soon, and Mrs. Rowley was so pleased at the sight of Miss Joyce’s rig, that she hurried down to the road forgetting all about Bennie ; and it was not until after Miss Joyce had been talking on the porch for some moments, and Maggie had gone with Lonnie to see the barn preparations, that Mrs. Rowley thought of the apron. By that time more friends had come, and, finally, when the boys’ load from the station came laughing up the



road, the apron would still have been in evidence if Lonnie had not uncovered the young man's shining apparel. Bennie Cook was unloaded and gave himself over to the ecstasy of seeing Lonnie. The matron kissed Lonnie affectionately, while Kate and Mary nudged each other at the sight; and they themselves greeted her with the same good-natured nonchalance that always characterized them.

"Lonnie hasn't grown any homelier, sure," said Mr. Cook to Mr. Rowley.

"No," laughing, "not much."

The minister and the doctor and the Gates' and all the other friends were soon there, and the festivity began in earnest. The barn was deliciously cool and appetites were precisely in condition most adapted to Mrs. Rowley's culinary efforts. If ever people were beguiled by salads and patès and fish this and fish that, and chicken this and chicken that, and the notable side dishes for which Mrs. Rowley had in times past been justly famed, those people were; and when it came to creamy concoc-



tions destined to melt in the mouth, "just triffin' things," as Mrs. Rowley said, and to the apotheoses of cakes, and to the ice-cream, the guests, without hesitation, pronounced the verdict that Mrs. Rowley had cast Delmonico wholly and completely into the shade. "Where I'd like to be a day like this," murmured Ted to Frank.

"This feast," said Mr. Rowley, rising, as the cake and so forth course was in progress, "is in celebration of the birthday of my niece, Ruth Lonnette Rowley, only child of my brother, John Rowley, whom many of you knew in his early manhood. That Lonnie had been with us before we knew this, you are all aware. That she should have been brought to us seems one of the wonderful Providences of God. And I want to say right here, that even if we had not known she was our blood relation, she was to have been one of our family for always. She has been the life of our house since she came, and has brought us more good and happiness than we could ever repay, and I want to say right here—I'm proud and glad she's a Rowley!"



The applause following this effort was prolonged. The speech-making ball had been set rolling; everybody made a speech and none fell on unresponsive hearts.

"I think I shall have to speak for my son," said Mr. Cook, "as he can't speak for himself, and yet I am sure no one here could have more to say as to Lonnie's virtues and graces than he could. However, on the whole, you may look at him if you will, his speech is in his eyes."

Everybody looked at once at Bennie Cook, to see him gazing at Lonnie with the most rapt expression, a goodly piece of cake in one hand and the other grasping Lonnie's apron.

"We have heard of a good many things to Lonnie's credit to-day," said Miss Joyce, "but the thing that we are all in a mood to appreciate is that she helped get up this dinner."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Rowley, heartily glad to see a chance for her speech on a familiar subject, "Lonnie's going to make a splendid cook!" and the applause was redoubled.



“My speech shall be practical,” said the doctor. “Lonnie can just come and talk it over with me when she wants to study medicine.”

“Oh, my!” exclaimed Lonnie, a flash of gratitude in her eyes as she looked at the doctor.

“Speech, Frank!” called some one.

“Oh, now,” said Frank, rising, “I can’t be expected to pile this agony up any further, but I will say I don’t half mind having Lonnie for a cousin!” Then he and Lonnie and Ted broke into a sudden irresistible laugh that carried everybody with it, without any one’s knowing precisely why.

“Come, Ted!” smiled Mr. Rowley.

“Since Lonnie has turned into a Rowley she doesn’t really need anything else,” said he, promptly, “but I’m glad she’s had the luck. I’m sure myself if I had a chance to live in this world more times I would choose to be a Rowley—first, last, and all the time.”

More applause, and then as there seemed to



be no one who had not made a speech the doctor called out Lonnie.

“Oh,” said she, cheerfully, her bright little face all smiles, “I’ll just say that I’m the gladdest person alive to belong to Uncle Joe, and Aunt Letty, and Bennie, and Ted”—with a determined glance at Ted—“and I don’t half mind, either, being cousin to Frank.”

And so ended, as things will, the great feast, and Lonnie was fairly installed as a real Rowley and became known as one of the family in all the country round about.

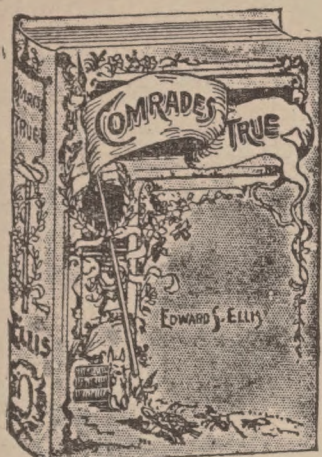
THE END







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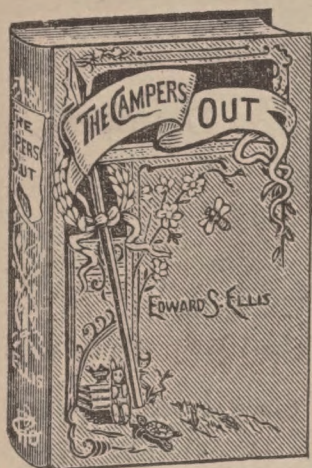
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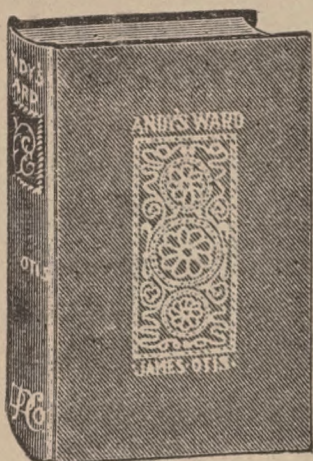
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Two boys, Andy and Jerry, are employed to wait upon this queerly assorted family. Their troubles with the dwarf and his pets, during which the boys are aided and counselled by the giant, make up the lighter portion of the story.

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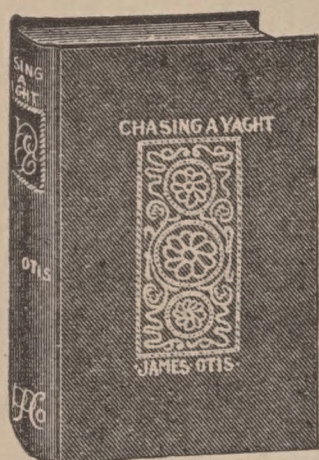
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Two boys have engaged to run a steam yacht for the double purpose of pleasure and profit, and after carefully fitting her up they launch her, only to find the next morning that she is gone—stolen—as they later discover, by two other boys who had been refused a half-interest in her. The rightful owners start in hot pursuit, and in an attempt to recapture the steamer are themselves made prisoners. It is the intention of the thieves to hold the owners prisoners until the Hudson River is reached and then put them ashore, but their plans miscarry owing to the intervention of two rather rough citizens who find their way aboard the yacht and make themselves generally at home. Fortunately one of the owners manages to effect his escape, and gaining the assistance of the authorities the little vessel is speedily restored to them.

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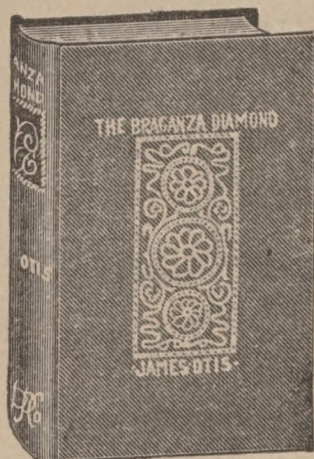
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Long before the opening events of this story the fragments of this celebrated gem are supposed to have been taken from a wreck by an old sea captain, and secreted by him on a lonely island in Roanoke Sound.

This aged captain, now quite feeble, sends for his niece and her daughter. They invite two bright boys to accompany them, and engaging a steam launch the four, in company with the owner—a trusty sailor—set out for the lonely island. Arriving there they are distressed at finding the captain already dead. To add to their discomfort they also discover that the former owners of the diamond have appeared upon the scene. The little party is forcibly made prisoner, and their captors demand that they forthwith produce the precious stone. This, of course, they are unable to do, but discovering among the old captain’s effects a curious cryptogram, they are led to hope that its solution may reveal the secret hiding place of the diamond, and thus restore to them their freedom. This theory eventually proves correct, but not until after the party has endured many hardships, and passed through many exciting experiences.

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